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Postcoloniality, Globalization and the Disjunctured Adivasi Voices

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Lad raheinain Adivasi

Udhghoshitulgulanmein

Kat raheinainvriksh

Mafiyaonkikulhadi se

Badhrahehainkankritke jungle. (Lugun)

Adivasis are fighting

In the pronouncedulgulan¹

With the axes of the mafia (traders)

Trees are slashed down

And as a result concretised forests are increasing (Translation ours)

Land, forest and other natural resources play a vital role in Adivasi lives. Their relationship with nature is based on the principle of reciprocity; the nature nourishes them and in return the Adivasis take adequate care without damaging it. The turbulence in the relationship of the twocommenced in the colonial period, which unabatedly continued in the post independence times and reached its climax with the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in the decade of 1990s. NEP introduced the phenomenon of globalisation, privatisation, and liberalisation in the Indian economy due to which the rate of exploitation of Adivasis accelerated catastrophically. The aforementioned poem “UdghoshitUlgulan” (Pronounced Ulgulan) by AnujLugun, an Adivasi poet and academician from Jharkhand, expounds on the concept of development by connecting urban expansion with the tragic fate of the Adivasis. The gradual disappearance of the natural forest is giving birth to a concretized forest. The destruction of the life force is giving way to lifeless structures. It is very strategically eliminated by the government and people involved with it to increase the structures. Our paper tries to probe the dynamics of development, a phenomenon that gained momentum in postcolonial era in India and how it affected a larger section of Adivasi population. Was modernity as a category which is often synonymous to ‘development’ a happy event for all or it was to exist only at the cost of the erosion of the ‘non-modern’ sections of society?

From the colonial period itself the traditional rights of the Adivasis over the natural resources were trampled, by the British administration. The introduction of the Land Acquisition Act of 1894², the Forest Act of 1864³, the Government of India Act 1935⁴ and several other Regulations played a significant role in isolating the Adivasis from their land, forest and also from the non-Adivasi population as the Government of India Act divided the regions into regulated and non-regulated areas. These Acts persisted unabatedly with certain minor changes in the post independence period as it befitted the needs of the Indian

Administration for their respective advantages. None of the Acts were abolished to benefit the Adivasis. Rahul Banerjee, an IIT-ian and an activist, remarks that laws were not abolished intentionally as “The industrial development in the post-independence India required heavy extraction of natural resources and consequently the independent Indian state thought it prudent to continue with these anti-Adivasi laws” (4010). This gradually increased the control of the government over these natural resources. Most of the policies and reports were in the favour of saving the environment and reducing people’s rights on forests.

As against the common supposed belief of the government the Adivasis were not destroying the forest; instead they were protecting them without law or compulsion. On the other hand government/contractors/traders under the garb of protection were slashing down the forests for commercial use. Huge tracts of natural forests were disappearing to make place for buildings and industrial projects. According to one of the report titled *How Coal Mining is Trashing Tiger land* prepared by the NGO Greenpeace, it has been observed that “The destruction of over one million hectares (1,104,000 ha.) of standing forest, of which over 739,000 hectare is dense forest” (Fernandes 3). There is an exceptional increase in the consumption of electricity in last few years, especially after 2007 according to the above mentioned report and in the future this will increase. To meet the need of coal, India has announced their upcoming projects for which they need 1,104,000 hectares of forest region. This almost constitutes 10% of the total forest region in India, if the government will sanction the proposal, we will only be left with 9% forest land. This would destroy the ecological balance. Not just the ecological balance but this would also affect the lives dependent on forest⁵.

The Adivasis seem to have fallen within the vacuum of State sponsored development agenda and their individual identities. The natural forests which the industrialists and traders view as a deterrent in their prospering projects is the source of life for the Adivasis. The inherent ambiguity within the concept of modernization has given birth to different forms of it with several critical connotations. With several scholarly responses to its various debates, and with the currency of the term ‘Modernity’ discussions on modernization has acquired a different significance along with separate labels. Some have labelled it as alternative or plural modernities while others write about ‘modernity at large’⁶. Attempts have also been made in the direction of studying modernity by identifying and juxtaposing it with certain concepts and practices as ‘non modern’.

Modernity, as an ally of postcolonialism, despite its subjective or rather ambiguous reception, is something that we cannot do away with especially when it comes to the discussions of democracy and development. Arjun Appadurai in his *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* tries to engage with the complex phenomenon of Modernity by analysing its cultural aspects. He claims that modernity is experienced differently over space and throughout time. Establishing an interesting connection between Modernity and Globalization he observes “Globalization has shrunk the distance between the elites, shifted key relations between producers and consumers, broken many links between labour and family life, obscured the lines between temporary locales and imaginary national attachments. He observes that Modernity now seems ‘more practical and less pedagogic, more experiential and less disciplinary than in the fifties and sixties, when it was mostly experienced through the propaganda apparatuses of the newly independent nation-states and their great leaders.(9-10)”The liberalization of the Indian economy, which is seen as a phase when we got over economic nationalisation is a point of further alienation for the Adivasis, who even after independence did not see much change in their lives.

The founding fathers of our Constitution had modified and enlarged the scope of protection of the Adivasis in continuance with the colonial laws. Keeping in mind the specific needs of the Adivasis, Article 46 claims “The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and all forms of the Scheduled tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation”⁷. The Fifth and Sixth Schedules also lay down special provisions for the Adivasis while Article 342 confers special powers on the President “to specify the tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribal communities” which shall be “deemed to be Scheduled Tribes in relation to the state”. Besides these constitutional remedies, the government with the help of some organisations have tried to reach out to the Adivasis and made them aware of some concerns related to their welfare. But why is then a sense of dissatisfaction emergent within the Adivasis as evident in much of contemporary literature? B.D.Sharma in his essay ‘The New Economic Policy and the Tribal People’ tries to address this problem by questioning the validation of the constitutional laws. He observes that the tussle of the Adivasis with the legal framework dates back to the colonial times when the British rulers had brought in certain Acts to restrict the Adivasis from forming any sort of organised rebellion. These Acts were not amended even after our independence so the practice of State-control over rights exists till date. Sharma further locates the problematic to the moment of economic liberalisation in the 1990s as he observes that “Globalisation and free-market are the twin basic principles underlying the new economic policy’ which further implied that ‘the market forces, with all associated processes of manipulation and monopoly in a universe of unequals, will be the main determinant of our position in that order” (47). Liberalisation saw a greater extension of urban spaces which led to natural forests being converted to economic plantations, which were often Adivasi lands. Urbanisation has led to the shortage of basic tenets of Adivasi subsistence: land, water and forests. Resource based industrial activities have resulted in large scale acquisition of Adivasi lands and forcible eviction of them as secondary subjects when new urban centres started coming up.

In the post-independence period, Adivasi literature emerged as a result of their pain and anguish. Hari Ram Meena in his poem, “Kaise Karoge Sabit” (How will you Prove) expresses the pain of displacement.

Sabhyatakenaam par
 Aakhirkar hi diyejaogebedakhal
 Hazaron salon kitumhari
 Pushtainibhaum se (Meena 29)
 In the name of civilisation
 After all you will be out casted
 From your own thousand year old
 Ancestral land. (Translation ours)

The poet in the aforementioned extract does express his inability to react against the authority which is not only taking away their land but also destroying their forests in the name of developmental projects⁸ and progress. It also expresses their pain, fears and helplessness. The pain of getting separated from their land and forest is immense as their ancestors lived there. It has created a feeling of uprootedness in their lives. The theory of

postcolonialism argues that “reversing economic domination is inextricably linked to cultural decolonization. It should be apparent at this point that dominant narratives that equate modernization with civilization, development, and progress can also become instruments of oppression in the hands of once-colonized elites and nation-states in the third world.”(4)

Development and displacement are two sides of the same coin; displacement (of poor) is one of the end results of development. Development is for the dominant group of the society. In other words development is for the already developed section of the society, not for the backward. The outcome of the development is greater inequality in the society. In the post-independence period the ‘development-induced displacement’ increased in a significant number. According to *India: Social Development Report 2008*, more than 60 million people both Adivasi and non-Adivasis were displaced between 1947 and 2004. Adivasi population constitutes more than 50 percent of the total displaced population. With displacement other complications tag along like rehabilitation/resettlement, ‘landlessness’, ‘joblessness’, ‘marginalization’ and ‘food insecurity’.

Probing the argument a little further, one realises that the provision⁹ for exploitation of the marginal section lies within the constitution itself. There is a provision in the constitution to seize land in the name of ‘Public Interest’. Prof. T.K.Shah, who was a member of the constituent assembly of 1949, tried to validate the provision of exploitation, in one of the debates of the constituent assembly as he points out that:

.... Acquisition of lands for public purpose, acquisition of any form of property, movable or immovable, for any ‘Public Purpose’ including the working of that enterprise for the benefit of public is, I think an inherent right of the sovereign community which should not be subject to any exception...I have therefore, suggested that any such property to be acquired can be acquired for ‘Public Purpose’ subject to such compensation if any...Not all property is deserving of compensation nor should the Constitution recognize categorically without qualification or modification the right to compensation as appears to me to be the case... (Saavyasachi 19)

The statement of Prof. T.K Shah raises two very important issues: one is the clause of ‘Public Purpose’ and the second is that of compensation. However the term ‘Public Purpose’ has not been defined till date. He made the concept too flexible which helped the state to exploit it according to its needs. The flexibility of the concept has also given way to the exploitation of the poor. In the name of public purpose the state can approve of any project according to their wish, as it also says that the state does not need to define the public purpose. For the second point of rehabilitation and compensation, Prof T.K Shah also proposed a relief for the government of the responsibility of providing compensation and rehabilitation to the landless.

These ideas promoting the autonomy of State have been reflected within our constitutional provisions. Initially there were seven fundamental rights¹⁰, but Right to Property was removed from the Fundamental Rights by the 44th Amendment Act in 1978 and shifted to constitutional rights¹¹, paving the way for the government to take away the private property for development or in the name of ‘Public Interest’.

The occurrence of these developmental projects increased after independence and especially in the last two decades after the New Economic Policy of 1991. The hidden cost¹² of these projects is always more than the profit they make but it always goes unnoticed.

Though there is a provision of rehabilitation¹³ but Adivasis are not rehabilitated but resettled. Though both the terms are used interchangeably but both of them are very different.

All these concerns were given voice in the literature produced by Adivasis. Many writers from different regions share the same concern. It is not that Adivasis do not write romantic songs about forest or their lives, they do. The romantic experience they express might be different from each other but the threat they sense or the problems they face are almost similar. Dr Ram Dayal Munda in one of his poem “VikasKa Dard” (Pain of Development) expresses his anxieties amidst intensity of development projects.

Banngayahungeedad
 Rahadaud
 Sheharkioor
 Marne kepehle
 Yakiepped
 Vishal shaalka
 Gira
 Jaarahachira
 Beech machine aara
 Deshkeliye
 Kehtehai
 Vikaskeliye...(Munda 42)
 I have become a jackle
 Running towards city
 Before dying
 Or like a tree
 Like a huge shaul tree
 It falls
 Machines slash it
 From the centre with the cutter
 They say
 It is for development
 For the country. (Translation ours)

The fruits of development have not been shared equally by all. The price of the development is generally paid by the underdeveloped sections of the society. Apart from the governmental projects, with globalisation other multinational companies have also stepped into the market. The aforementioned poem by Ram Dayal Munda tries to show the other side of development. One side of the coin is the progress of the country, better opportunities for the unemployed, and a better life. But there is another side too. The dark side which is of poverty, displacement, destruction of the natural resources, increase in the slum area, forced migration, death, subhuman living condition etc. These are few end products of development/progress out of many. In another poem, “SabseBadaKhatra” (Most Dangerous Threat) MahadevToppo explains the loss.

Sirfapnekhetkhaliyanmakaan
 Hi nahikhoyehainhumne
 “Khoyihaisaikadovarsho se arjit-
 Purkhonkegaadhepasenekikamai
 Apnibhasasanskritiauritihas.” (50)
 Not only have we lost

Our home and land
 But we also have lost
 Our acquired ancestral wealth
 Our language, culture and history. (Translation ours)

DipeshChakrabarty in his *Habitations of Modernity* tries to differentiate between memory and history, as he observes that memory as a functional process is a “far reaching complex phenomenon that reaches beyond the recorded history, for memory is much more than what the mind can remember or what objects can help us document about the past”(115). It is often too complicated to be recovered and hence poses several challenges in front of the person who tries to recover them. Toppo in another poem, “SamajhdarTitliyan” (Wise Butterflies), tries to collect reminiscences of the Chotanagpur, which once was a home for these memories.

Haan! Chotanagpurkejangalonmein

Nahiaati ab titliyan

Sari ki sari chaliyatihain

Kulumanalikighatiyon me

We don't see butterflies in the forests of Chotanagpur,

Instead they have migrated to places like Kullu and Manali,

Where the environment is cleaner. (Translation ours)

The paradisiac picture of the past is fading out with the invasion of the foreign intrusion. In the name of development Adivasis are being increasingly alienated as the national development agenda is separating them from their very basic necessities and from their rich cultural heritage. As can be seen, postcolonialism is a period following the end of colonialism and development for the mainstream but for the Adivasis it has become a form of neo and complicit colonialism. The impact of Globalization in the postcolonial scenario has adversely affected the indigenous population as their language, culture and modes of exchanges are getting diluted and at the brink of extinction. In the blind race of expansion and growth, the basic tenets of postcolonialism are being threatened as it had once given voice to all minor discourses and created a space for multiple identities. Our multicultural ethos is eroding away and gradually turning into a monolithic identity.

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End Notes:

¹Ulgulan was the movement started by BirsaMuda against the corrupt practices of British and Dikhus (non-Adivasis)

²Under the Land Acquisition act (1894), British government seized Adivasi land for progress/ development. For more information see Somayaji, Sakarama & Smrithi Talwar. eds. Preface. *Development-induced Displacement, Rehabilitation and Resettlement in India: Current Issues and Challenge*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

³Under The Forest Act 1864, the Adivasis were denied the access to the forest. For more information see Somayaji, Sakarama & Smrithi Talwar. eds. Preface. *Development-induced Displacement, Rehabilitation and Resettlement in India: Current Issues and Challenge*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

⁴Singh, K.S. "Concept of Tribe: A Note". *Schedule Tribes and Development*. Eds. H.S. Saksena, Vinay Kumar Srivastava and Sukant K Chaudury. New Delhi: Serials Publications, 2006. 90-98.

⁵For more information see Fernandes "How Coal Mining is Trashing Tiger land" by the NGO Greenpeace.

⁶A seminal work by Arjun Appadurai. 1997. This book traces the contours of change that have a relationship with Modernity as a concept or otherwise. Concepts like emergence of 'diasporic public sphere' 'production of the local' and 'global ethnoscares' have been discussed here.

⁷ For more information see <http://ncsc.nic.in/files/ncsc/new6/261.pdf>.

⁸ "Displacement on a large scale is now increasingly occurring by other kinds of projects as well" (apart from building dams) like thermal power stations, mining industry, highways, airports etc.

⁹ Though these provisions were for the benefit of the majority but the makers of the constitution either failed to see the inherent quality of exploitation or they deliberately ignored it for the interest of the majority.

¹⁰ 1) Right to equality, 2) Right to freedom, 3) Right against exploitation, 4) Right to freedom of religion, 5) Cultural and educational rights, 6) Right to property, and 7) Right to constitutional remedies.

¹¹ This means that initially when Right to property was a fundamental right it can only be taken away only in two kinds of emergencies, first if the state is in conflict with the other country and second in the case of civil war. These are the only two conditions in which the right to property can be abolished. As it moved to constitutional rights, the state can take away the property for public interest.

¹² The hidden cost is the displacement of thousands of poor people and loss of their livelihood etc. (destruction of nature, cutting of trees, dumping the chemical waste of the factory in open etc. is never counted).

¹³ A draft of the National Policy for rehabilitation of persons displaced as a consequence of Acquisition of land was prepared by the Ministry of Rural Development in 1994. It was ineffective as most of the people are not rehabilitated.