

Exclusion through Development: The Kerala Experience

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Review Article

ABSTRACT

The burgeoning development literature has spawned panoply of concepts and terms, often creating a verbal fetishism, destroying creative thinking and distorting the very meaning of development. A current fad is inclusive development, a term which is not defined precisely; nor is its scope delineated. As yet, there is no unanimity on the concept, source, and measure of development. However, there is a tendency to consider development as the panacea for all problems of society. None-the-less, there is an school of thought which believes that “development is dead “and we are in the “post-development era”. Theory and history are testimony to the fact that there cannot be inclusive development in a society that is divided along the caste-class-gender axis. Development is possible only for a person or a social group which has a material base. The development process in India has bypassed and even excluded adivasis who are regular victims of primitive accumulation and oppression in India as a whole. Kerala is not an exception to this deplorable national scenario. Of course, the state is acclaimed as a development model, God’s own country and a first world society in a third world country for the high HDI it has. But deprived groups like adivasis have not been able to avail themselves of this achievement. The adivasis particularly have been losing their resource base and getting excluded through development. What Kerala has is not inclusive development but inclusive welfare. It appears that there is inexorable need for going back to the values of Enlightenment and liberalism and classical individualism so that every adivasi is able to realize her full potential.

Keywords: Development, Post- development, Adivasis, The adivasi question, Exclusion

INTRODUCTION

The genesis, polymorphic evolution and regular and systematic enrichment of ‘development knowledge’ in the post-Second World war period with the discovery of the ‘poor’ and the ‘Third World’, culminated in the emergence of a verbal fetishism enmeshing the term ‘development’. Terms such as empowerment, entitlement, and capability have not only become sticky, but even caused stasis in development thinking. A term which has acquired currency, and can be probably deemed a passing fad, is ‘inclusive development’ even as many persons and groups remain/ get excluded from the ruling paradigm.

It may be observed at the outset that in a race/caste- class-gender- divided society, ie a society overlaid with inherited, institutionalized injustice, development cannot be anything but divisive. Only in a socialist society, wherein, everyone has free and equal access to the means of production, can there be inclusive development. Such a system which comes into existence after a revolution and overthrow of capitalism , abolition of private property and afire with optimism, enthusiasm and altruism, is built on a lofty moral/ethical plane purporting, evocatively, to ensure that everyone contributes according to their ability while everyone gets according to their need. With a social economy embedded in a moral society undergirded by universal love, the system ensures peace, stability, sustainability and happiness.

In a divided paradigm wherein inequality is structural and is either taken for granted, rationalized, and even extolled, or considered as inevitable and inexorable, any talk about inclusive development is unavailing, disingenuous or duplicitous, for development is not a zero-sum game. Capitalism diacritically favors the best and the strongest, a justification for inequality. Inequality reproduces and exacerbates inequality irrespective of the system. Development is not a leveler; it

creates and accentuates inequality. This fact merits reiteration given the invidious and deplorable tendency in some 'left' circles to create the impression that it is neo-liberalism that creates inequality and should, therefore, be denounced. In fact, it is the feudal order that produced egregious forms of inequality of wealth, income, status and power and the corresponding hierarchies, values and practices gnawing at the very foundations of a humane eco-system. These survived and continued giving rise to patrimonial capitalism which became a threat to competitive capitalism based on liberalism, individualism and laissez faire. Patrimonial capitalism, not necessarily entailing a negation of pre-capitalist and non-capitalist values and practices, often encourages and promotes their prevalence; the denuoement being that capitalism co-exists with non-capitalist (both pre- and post-) forms of production organization and social practices. The talk about the dominant mode of production (capitalist) to gloss over this paradoxical situation is less than convincing. Thus, in India, today, we have a capitalist basic structure and a feudal super structure, cosily co-existing; caste/communal and gender discriminations exhibiting an exceptional resilience. Any challenge to this uneasy situation is brutally suppressed by the state which has the monopoly over the instruments of violence.

Looked at from the above perspective, India, in the dirigiste phase pursued a planned development path that not only perpetuated existing forms of exclusion and marginality but also, in certain cases, created new ones. Thus, paradoxically, exclusion through development has been an inexorable experience of India; any tweaking at the peripheral integument can be skin-deep at the best and window-dressing at the worst. This, retrospectively, is unsurprising as India started planning in a feudal society as also Independence which meant transfer of power from the Western rulers to the Westernised Indian rulers had not meant parametric changes for the Indian masses which continued facing the same rigid hierarchy and ossified, antediluvian values and practices.

Like India as a whole, Kerala also never traversed a path of inclusive development. The Land Reforms program, bandied about as radical, was, in fact, a fraud on dalits, the traditional landless tillers of the soil. What these victims of political chicanery got was the 'hutment right' which is proclaimed as a revolutionary outcome forgetting the facts that it was a logical/collateral benefit, Land Reforms were about agricultural land, not about hutment right, and the basic slogan raised was "land to the tiller of the soil" and not "hutment right to hutment-dwellers". A greater irony is that the dalits who were thus shortchanged are cruelly repressed and suppressed whenever they raise any demand for land. The co-alitions – the capitalist class UDF and the multi-class LDF-that alternately rule the state create an illusion of inclusiveness presuming that 1. redistribution of resources (physical, financial, and technological) is not necessary; 2. What is now required is the acceleration of the development of the forces of production without any change in the extant production relations; 3. The adivasi land problem is a non-issue; 4. dalits should not demand land; and 5. though the state has a record of widely distributing social sector services like education and health, what is so distributed is low quality Malayalam medium education for the poor which neither promotes critical thinking nor equips the 'educated' for any productive activity (hence, they become obstreperous, Lumpen politiicians) while reserving high quality English medium education for the rich and powerful. After all, the services accessed by the poor are low/poor in quality, a fact which is not broken in Kerala. The phantasmagoria surrounding Kerala, the development exemplar, is a red herring and is used schematically, along with state and political violence to silence the oppressed whenever they make any demand. The recent events are testimony to the fact that with the unprecedented brutal suppression of dissent and questioning and given the Teflon character of the impish rulers, in Kerala, like in the country as a whole, democracy is in the last lap; the national autocrat and the regional ones have in their DNA the same insatiable thirst for personality cult and the coagulating arrogance of power, their faces and body language striking fear and intimidation rather than any noble humane impressions. A grieving mother who was protesting against the denial of justice in the case relating to the brutal murder of her son reportedly by the authorities of a professional college was brutalized in full view of people watching various TV channels. The unconscionable and ruthlessly pursued political vandalism, the main bane of the state is shuddering. Ruling party cruelty was never greater in Kerala. Politics of vengeance, conjoined with the politics of intolerance prevailing in the country as a whole, is tearing the social fabric asunder, sending shock waves far and wide.

A more conspicuous case of exclusion through development resorting to subterranean as well as open means attempted with impunity comprises the adivasis in the state whose survival struggles are legion. This paper focuses more sharply and in greater detail on the adivasi question in the state.

ADIVASIS IN KERALA: THE DEVELOPMENT QUESTION

The unprecedented state brutality against adivasis at Muthanga in Kerala shocked humanity and received world-wide attention denting the state's image considerably. Consequently, several administrative measures were taken post-haste, purportedly for ameliorating their worsening conditions. However, regular media reports reveal that their conditions have been nose-diving as shown by rising infant and maternal mortality rates, child mal nutrition and steeply falling living and working conditions, interdicting the dictum that humanity can only progress and not regress. The dismal scenario in the "God's own country" has emerged despite the tall claims by the governments, both Central and State, and also the much-vaunted Panchayati raj bodies, and reaffirming (if affirmation is required) that adivasi development is the Cinderella of the development sweepstakes in the State and the constantly deteriorating existential situation of the adivasis flies in

the face of the much tomed Kerala development model bandied about by vested interests; a model about which there are truths, half-truths and untruths. As these interests have economic and political power, intellectual resources and easy access to academia and media, what they say and write receive uncritical attention and acceptance. Even the decentralized regime, handed down from above rather than evolved from below, could neither halt the structural retrogression nor reverse it, creating a tweedledee-tweedledum situation, spreading pathological hopelessness and helplessness among the adivasi communities, thus, rendering the hapless adivasis the inconsolable victims, rather than victors of so-called 'development'. As the adivasis are straining at the leash as never before and their situation cannot fall any lower, now is the right time to do introspection as to what went wrong, when and where, and re-envision the future in step with the conjectural zeitgeist rather than taking the misadventure of going against the head-wind and getting the cold shoulder. Thinking de novo and changing tack are no longer an option for the adivasis. The world is wide-awake; the adivasis should not be comatose.

This study takes the teleological position that adivasi issues must be discussed in a non-class-reductionist/essentialist framework as non-class forms and practices are more deterministic in the pace, pattern and rhythm of materialistic existence and optative ontology of these communities which have a shared consciousness engendered by a shared history. Literally and figuratively, and from a purely quotidian point of view, these people, as a socio-economic group, do not fit into any neatly delineated class category in the classical Marxian sense. They manage to live precariously. Thus, they are a precariat, rather than proletariat. It will be instructive to compare and contrast them with the proletariat about which a strong textbook fetishism prevails. With employment and income security, and with the support of various political parties, the latter is always in a privileged position. Wishing and envisioning the organized working class acting as a vanguard force and liberating the oppressed masses and creating a just society is a pipedream. Such habits of thinking are doctored and sustained by vested interests now heading political parties.

A FEW PREFATORY OBSERVATIONS

For positing our topic of discussion in perspective, we set out below a few putatively germane prefatory observations.

In the vast literature on development, there has not been unanimity of views concerning the concept, source and measure of development, thus, making it a protean concept, causing prolonged, intellectually stimulating linear as well as non-linear discussions and debates, enriching our understanding in depth and width.

There is no government of all people: rich and poor; honest and dishonest; criminals and victims; molester and the molested etc.

For homologous reasons, there is nothing like development of all: the super- rich and the chronically poor; capitalists and workers; the dominating and the dominated, and so on.

Only Communists have a redistributive approach to development. In their theoretical thinking and predication, they give first priority to distribution of resources so that production and distribution synchronize. For the others, it is a sequence: growth first, then distribution of the benefits of growth. The latter even go to the ridiculous extent of declaring that we cannot distribute poverty. For the Communists, not only forces of production but also production relations are equally or more important. They start with land reforms, literacy, and decentralization. For the rightists, the focus is on growth. The distributive consequences of growth- fixation are alarming today. In India, one percent of the super-rich control 58 percent of wealth. The super-rich one percent of the American population controls 77 percent of the wealth in that country ^[1,2]. For contextual reasons, we cannot take this discourse here any further.

In India, it was after the failure of the over-all, aggregate plans, vigorously pursued in the first three Five Year Plans that from the Fourth Plan onwards, the focus got shifted to target group approaches. [Tribal Sub-Plan in the Fifth Plan and Special Component Plan (for the dalits) in the Seventh Plan merit special mention].

To bluntly put the matter, development is not for the poor. It is not for the unfree: those who are starving, ill, illiterate/ignorant, sans shelter, etc. For a starving person, the next meal, rather than development, is the worry and concern. Analogously, for the malnourished and ill, development is not the immediate concern. Amartya Sen rightly considers development as freedom: freedom from poverty, disease, illiteracy, unfreedom, i.e., shackles and bondages of various sorts ^[3]. Freedom is the source of development; and development must enhance and elevate the scope of freedom.

We are discussing development issues in the post-development era where political divisions reach across the aisle for essentialising/recentring homo economicus and deifying innovation in the entrepreneurship-driven economic paradigm which has become the defining frame.

Development, once deified and deemed as a desideratum, is dead and its obituary had been written nearly two decades back ^[4-6]. Today, the heuristic, popular or policy search is not for development, or alternative development, but for alternative to development.

State-led, project-centric, development is passī and does not mesh with the current climate of thinking; nor does it provide any positive hope for the future. With the coming into being of an ever-expanding knowledge economy with innovation as its mainspring and renewable energy, and its innate tendency to reach everywhere and encompass everybody, bureaucratically dispensed, lackluster development has been thrown overboard not only for its inefficiency and myopia but also, primarily, for denying any subject/agency role to the poor in taking decisions concerning their life. Scholars think about the poor, policy-makers make policy for them, experts formulate programs and projects for them, officials implement programs/projects for the poor, NGOs take up the issues of the poor; in other words, the non-poor decide everything for the poor. The poor have no role in development. They are considered as passive objects/recipients of development, reaching them in trickles or not reaching at all. As it is 'from above' or 'from others', people remain unconcerned or insouciant about the dystopia that is put in place. Any objective reconnaissance, either syncretic or diachronic, would reveal that an object of development can be brought under subjection by the rulers; an indefatigable subject cannot be. Being given the short end of the stick, people's thinking has been inexorably appropriated, embedding in them, instead, pathological inferiority complex, incurable fear psychosis and nervy nihilism. Thus, development is presented as manna from heaven or an intransitive incident and people are considered as "beneficiaries of development", i.e., freeloaders in the literal sense of the term. At the macro level, it entails a development rat race among countries without an opposite internal feedback loop.

The cocky and cock-eyed rulers, blind with the arrogance of power and enjoying monopoly over the instruments of violence and oppression, uses development as a weapon for forcing the poor into submission to authority by accepting unquestioningly any development program. Questioning even life-threatening development is deemed to be questioning authority, the state, and questioning the state is sedition; so goes the legato but leggy causation. Rulers become democratically elected autocrats. The idiom and body language change lock, stock and barrel, once a 'leader' mutates into a ruler, now in the total grip of power neurosis. In the case of adivasis, the state, that is the instrument of oppression, always, almost invariably, acts in cahoots with the predatory/predaceous non-tribal settlers. The power structure is skewed against the adivasis. This, one can say on an a priori basis, has, in fact, been the unbroken history of the retroflex 'adivasi development' in Kerala, irrespective of the coalition in power.

Grasping the etiology of the precariousness of adivasi existence is challenging in more than one sense even as such a precognition is the precursor to launching any meaningful redemptive/curative measures.

Like in other parts of India, speaking about the adivasis, and speaking for them are trendy; but speaking to them is scarce and speaking with them is dangerous. Those speaking with the adivasis are deemed to be the greatest threat to internal (i.e., ruling class) security.

THE ADIVASI QUESTION, WHAT IS IT?

By raising the above question, we do not intend to go into any conceptual or epistemological questions which themselves are not a contextual or irrelevant in addressing the issues involved in their multifarious dimensions and implications. None-the-less, for minimizing the invidious tendency for discursiveness and detour, and avoiding batting on a sticky wicket, we seek clarity of comprehension so as to make the discussion shorn of frills.

Is the adivasi question a development question? It seems that we are going overboard in posing the adivasi question rather than attempting the striptease of our own understanding of the situation. Have the adivasis ever demanded development? Have they ever asked for express highways, aerodromes, central universities, multi-star hotels, multi-specialty hospitals, etc. in their settlements? In other words, what is the adivasi question? If development is our focal point, what do we mean by this? Do we mean development of adivasis or that of adivasi areas?

ADIVASI STRUGGLES IN INDIA: A TELESCOPIC/KALEIDOSCOPIC OVERVIEW

History of adivasi struggles in India is a well-documented theme and has formed an integral part of a stimulating historiography, viz, subaltern history. Hence, we do not intend to provide here a nuanced or calibrated account of that history. Suffice it to say here that history of adivasis in India is a history of resistance and, concomitantly, the most prolonged struggles in the colonial and post-colonial history of the country. In both the colonial and post-colonial periods, these were resistances to primitive accumulation by the state as well as state-supported/promoted agencies and individuals and the resultant deprivation and pauperization of a people who had their own socio-economic system based on in situ values of equity (including gender equity) and environmental sustainability and whose parametric life-view itself was the prophylaxis against unhealthy tendencies. In these protests, the state, both the colonial and Indian, took an anti-adivasi stance. Adivasis' disenchantment with the state has its provenance here. A point of note here is worth bearing in mind. In the Indian state, which is indisputably more oppressive and redoubtable, adivasis have nominal representation that redounds to its structural quality, viz, individual inclusion and group exclusion. Here, the relevant question is not one of representation or participation, but of power. The adivasis are not in a position to tilt the balance of power in their

favour; nor are they able to influence policy. Here, the pertinent question is whose ideas, knowledge and thinking influence policy.

Broadly, one can say that it is of the ruling class; ruling ideas are ruling class ideas. According to Marglins, “dominating knowledge is that of the dominating class” [7.8]. However, since in a parliamentary democracy, ruling class is not a monolith, and is divided into various political parties, the truism should be retrofitted and restated to mean that ruling ideas are, mutatis mutantis, ruling party ideas and since the ruling party, more often than not, is under the sway of one individual ruler, that individual decides matters, rather, unilaterally. It is doubtful whether competitive electoral politics and parliamentary democracy can stall the rise of such individuals who succeed in subduing not only their own party but also others. (Suspension of individual freedom during Emergency and near-total eclipse of the wide ambit of Article 19 of the Constitution today are telling examples). Often, democratically elected leaders turn out to be impish and become enemies of democracy, throwing the ‘hallowed’ system into cul-de-sac, no matter the surrealism and phony pretence they maintain give the people the optical illusion that “we, the people” are the source of power. It is time that hare-brained elected leaders realized that democracy is not only about ballot paper; it is also about hearts and minds for which the sledge-hammer of the conduct of free and fair elections (with the albatross of strong law enforcement) cannot be a substitute.

The colonial state, their nemesis, branded 150 tribal communities as Criminal Tribes which, because of the past stigma, still find it impossible to join the mainstream despite the fact that Prime Minister Nehru redesignated them as Denotified tribes in 1952. Primitive accumulation (David Harvey prefers to call it).

“Accumulation by Dispossession”; and the subjugation and servitude of the adivasis have been an integral part of the emergence and growth of Indian capitalism. The process is analogous to Cedric Robinson’s account of “the modern world economy”. “The Atlantic slave trade and the slavery of the New World were integral to the modern world economy. Their relationship to capitalism was historical and organic rather than adventitious or synthetic” [9]. Thus, any longitudinal narrative of the adivasi situation in India cannot be given independently of the transformation of the Indian economy.

A word about the adivasi struggles seems to be in order. These struggles epitomize a different and particular brand/type of politics which is nonparty as well as non-ideological as opposed to the power politics of the mainstream. A fortiori, one can assert that from a parametric, quotidian point of sheer survival, resource politics is real and substantive politics and scores over power politics. Here also, the adivasis maintain their uniqueness. Thus, the adivasi question primarily is a resource question, not a development question.

SINCE INDEPENDENCE

It would be instructive and insightful to know, after the transfer of power from the Western rulers to the Westernized Indian rulers, what changed and what did not change from the point of view of the adivasis. We list a few below.

Approaches to Tribals in Post-colonial India: Nehru’s Imprint

Politicians, policy-makers, bureaucrats and NGOs are masquerading as progressive and pro-*adivasis*, but in point of fact, these categories consider them as beasts of burden to be redeemed and reclaimed to humanity.

The Indian Constitution and the Adivasis

The Indian Constitution provides the highest degree of protection and importance to *adivasis*. It has two Schedules (Fifth for central India) and Sixth (for the North- East) and nearly 20 Articles, directly and indirectly benefiting them. The quintessence of these is *adivasi* autonomy. The constitution, premised on liberalism, parliamentary democracy, etc, and purporting to build a welfare state (as adumbrated under the Directive Principles of State Policy in Part IV) enjoins the state to protect the *adivasis* from various sorts of exploitation and also to promote their development. And the peace-loving *adivasis* have reposed their total and un-flinching faith in the Constitution and have been seeking solutions for their problems of deprivation and structural alienation within its framework, testifying to the fact that it is neither wide of the mark nor an over-statement to say that no other section of the Indian society has greater conformity to and expectations from the Constitution and the judiciary. It is also pertinent, en passant, to differentiate the *adivasi* resource struggles from the Maoist movement as the powers-that-be have wrongly and questionably come to consider the two as inseparable. *Adivasis* whose struggles pre-date (their beginning is usually traced to 1773) the Naxalite/Maoist movement, are not fighting the system nor are they aiming at overthrowing it. They are just resisting primitive accumulation. These two movements were not coeval in origin, nor similar in ideological orientation and persuasion. The *adivasis* are seeking solutions for their problems only and are doing so within the Constitutional framework, whereas the Maoists are against the system and do not approve of the Constitution. Maoists are fighting all sorts of injustices which, according to them are structural and systemic, while *adivasis* are reasserting claims to resources which are historically and constitutionally theirs. In other words, *adivasi* struggles, inherently limited in scope and confined to the *adivasis*, to

the exclusion of other exploited and oppressed sections of society, have not transmogrified into a larger movement strong enough and sufficient for either questioning or restructuring the existing system in its totality. Moreover, as has been repeatedly happening in Kerala, the adivasis always appeal to the state Government, rather than directly confronting the non-tribal settlers, thus, testifying to their commitment to and faith in the prevailing democratic system. Hence, targeting them as Maoist-sympathizers/supporters is tilting at windmills and also an ingenious way of skirting the real issues. This is nothing but ruling class perfidy.

The constant and unmitigating deprivation of the adivasis and the intensification of their misery had been taking place under democratic rule by left and right parties. The rulers' nonchalance and wanton disregard for the suffering adivasis has been classic and mind numbing. While closing their eyes to the cruel dispossession, and tacitly promoting it (they and their supporters' stakes are incredibly high here), these parties, now in coalition and alternately coming to power throw crumbs to these victims in the form of welfare programs. Now, there are three coalitions in Kerala falling head over heels in perpetrating cruelty and inhumanity towards the adivasis. For all parties, conversion is the panacea; conversion of various sorts: conversion to political parties and conversion to religions. Thus, the phalanx of depredators-of the left, centre and right-succeeds in keeping the adivasis divided and, thus, preventing them from asserting themselves unitedly. [Recall the fate of Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha].

For the sake of clarity, let us see what the adivasis are demanding. They are demanding, first and foremost, land. It is the fiduciary responsibility of the state to meet that demand by restoring to the adivasis the alienated land and preventing further alienation. Their next demand is for autonomy. In all countries with considerable indigenous populations, such autonomy has been conceded. The India Constitution provides that. In the present state of Kerala, the native state of Travancore had given it under the Hillmen Settlement Act, 1903. Thus, the resource-owning adivasis must be left free to pursue their own interest, especially in this post-development era, leaving an increasing space to free-market economy. While people are free to judge their best interests, why only the adivasis should continue to be under the tutelage and control of a failed state? It is unethical, untenable and unwarranted to force the adivasis to perpetually depend on the state (which is quintessentially anti adivasi and a singularly failed agency in development) for anything and everything? It is cruel to deny these people the opportunity to avail themselves of the immense opportunities available in a neoliberal economy. If it is for the ideological satisfaction of a few individuals controlling some ruling parties, let them deny those rights to all people; let them change the system. Otherwise, they are presenting themselves as hypocritical and dishonest. Power of purse cannot be allowed to deny people their freedom.

LOOKING AHEAD

The arguments supra should not be construed to pull the plug on adivasi development. Its leit motif concerns liberty and agency. Let us admit that under the dirigiste regime, the adivasis did not get what they asked for and they got (impoverishment) what they did not ask for. Intimidating them in the name of so-called development is unavailing and total denial of justice and human rights. Let us not sit in judgment on what others need; or, more pointedly, what others should need. Though omnipresent and omnipotent, the rulers are neither omniscient nor infallible; not to call into question their pretention to altruism and be saviours of the poor, they are not divine incarnations. Let us harbor no illusion: rulers are pursuing their self-interest (which is not a bad interest); they have liberty to do that. Then, in the same vein, they must recognize people's liberty to pursue their interest in an untrammelled manner. Above all, leaders should have the realization that they are ordinary mortals without any transcendental or divine qualities; they are not celestial beings parachuted here to deal with involuted terrestrial matters and to redeem the wretched of the earth.

In conformity with the line of thinking presented above, the existing adivasi development strategy (TSP) needs relook. Studies show that the accelerated flow of funds under TSP since the Fifth Five Year Plan created a higgledy-piggledy situation and largely benefitted the non-adivasi settlers as the focus was on infrastructure development. Only one-fifth of the benefits accrued to the adivasis. With the development of infrastructure, adivasi areas developed, land price increased phenomenally and the adivasis were forced, by overt and covert means, to move into interior forests or on to hill-slopes where soil cover is thin and soil erosion is frequent. Thus, the strategy which released massive funds in the name of adivasis, ironically resulted in the creation of prosperous adivasi areas and pauperized adivasis. This is a classic case of exclusion through development.

The state and state-supported agencies and individuals plundered adivasis' resources and the state, representing all the depredators, gave them welfare programs which had been, at best window-dressing and at worst, a sham. These programs scarcely compensated the victims for the pillage of resources and the insidious metastasis of their once-opulent system spawning, consequently, contrapuntal currents of thought, notwithstanding the ruling class strategems like forming maleficent organizations Salwa Judum in Chhatisharh and AKS in Kerala, meant to promote fratidal combats among them.

It is not just that the adivasis are irrationally fixated with the resource question for any extraneous or ingenious reasons. A more fundamental consideration is involved here. That is, Article 21 of the Constitution propounding right to

life which, as the Supreme Court has recurrently emphasized in no uncertain terms, is meaningless without right to livelihood. ^[10] Land and forests are their livelihood-base, and their expropriation inexorably leads to the upending of their existential environs and their inevitable alienation in all its dimensions. The wide-spread consumption of illicit liquor by adivasi men, women, and even children, creating disastrous consequences must be, in the last analysis, traced to these phenomena. In Kerala, some tribal communities are reported to be on the verge of extinction. No serious measures to counteract these phenomena are seen to be in place. It seems to be that the rulers are tacitly supporting these so that it is easy to eviscerate, through means, overt and covert, the adivasi hamlets and settlements to the great advantage of the non-adivasi settlers who are the mainstay of the rulers in power from term-to-term. After all, rulers are alike, irrespective of the parties or socio-economic groups they belong to. Even a tribal ruler may not make a difference in this regard. Sometimes, as recent events corroborate, such a person can be more malfeasant and disingenuous than his/her peers. Dishonesty, lack of integrity, greed, and covetousness are not caste, religion, gender, or class-specific. Collaterally, proclivity for playing ducks and drakes with public money spreads its tentacles across the spectrum and no simulated sanctimonious stance can disabuse or mystify it.

In the light of the disquieting experience depicted above and the ominous prospects ahead, TSP funds should be utilized for individual- and family-centric activities in line with the spirit of the time, i.e., for creating small-scale manufacturing and business enterprises, and promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, enabling the adivasis to shift from low productivity, low income activities to high productivity, high income ones. They should have access to cutting-edge technology and modern management and marketing techniques and practices. Rather than being job seekers, the adivasis should try to become job-givers. Entrepreneurial spirit and mobility-economic, social, and above all, aspirational-should be the renewable energy for the younger generation. They should act today to create a good tomorrow. Those who do not have a good today will not have a good tomorrow. And act individually; any united action through mobilization is indiscreet and labor of Sisyphus as such action will be crushed by the entrenched anti-adivasi vested interests as they can take ready recourse to brute force to perpetrate coercion and cruelty. Adivasis in Kerala are too weak to stand up to the die-hard bullies confront the strong forces ranged against them and who will not pull punches or let their guards down when it comes to the question of grabbing resources. They should be thinking in individualistic terms. Instead of the individual wishing to benefit from the development (actually, it is growth, not development) of the system, let the system benefit from the development of the individual ^[11].

It is high time that the adivasis realized the political shenanigans of the rulers and gave precedence to economics over politics. Liberalism enables each person to realize her potential. As the power structure in Kerala continues to keep them on a tight leash, dalits or adivasis cannot influence the formulation of economic or social policy in the state; for historical and contemporary reasons, this is the monopoly of the upper castes and upper caste supremacists who pull out all the stops to crush criticism and questioning, notwithstanding the simulacrum of their secularism and humanism. As individual initiatives attract less hostility and coercion, individualism is the best plank for marginalized/excluded sections in general and the existentially threatened adivasis in particular. Make no mistake about it, the adivasis cannot cock a snook at the irascible rulers; nor can they alone bring about socialism in Kerala. They cannot afford to wait for a system change to take a plunge. Instead of doing others' bidding or anticipating quick fixes, the adivasis in the state should embrace a new makeover, take the road to freedom; they need to give thumbs up, not to pussy-footed and fly-by-night leaders and midget politicians but to neophyte adivasi entrepreneurs, greenhorn adivasi industrialists and adivasi businessmen who can herald a new dawn. Their pitiable situation was not their creation; but overturning it is their responsibility. And this calls for the emergence of rich/doughty individuals, in the place of feudal slaves and state-made mendicants. This is the need of the hour and for that the general policy atmosphere was never more opportune. The metastasis resulting from the roller-coaster ride called tribal development and the experience of navigating choppy waters with disastrous consequences in the maximalist- state era must provide the needed pertinacity for staying the course in the post-development era. Entrepreneurial capitalism should be the esprit de corps for the redefined, repositioned adivasis, who, realizing dysfunctionality of undernourished and mal-nourished political minds should always keep in mind that the world belongs to the bold. Mince no words: the rich were, are, and will be powerful; the poor were, are, and will be weak.

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