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MAKING OF TRIBE AND MODERN DILEMMA IN STUDYING TRIBES IN INDIA¹

The planet does not need more successful people. The planet desperately needs more peace makers, healers and restorers, story tellers and lovers of all kinds. - **Dalai Lama**

Abstract

In this presentation, I intend to show that in spite of the fact that in independent India the tribes have been provided with constitutional safeguards and attempts to develop them and integrate them with larger Indian society, they are the most deprived and displaced people in the country. I argue that what we are witnessing today is to a large extent owing to the legacy of colonization for which trijunction of South India provides enough and appropriate illustrations. Moreover it appears that the students of tribal studies in India have reached a blind alley - neither they have been able to set new relevant and challenging goals theoretical or otherwise for studies nor have been able to gain the confidence of the people they study. They have remained outsiders hungry for information-raw material for processing them in academic centers while people they have been studying are persistently and systematically peripheralized. We need to ask as to how we have reached to this stage, what are the problems in this stage and where do we go from here.

Keywords: *Making of tribe, constructing stages of cultural evolution, considering them as isolate, period of colonization and enforcement of supply of goods and services from tribes, continuation of trend in post colonial period, dilemma in conducting studies on tribes amidst huge contradictions of development and peripheralization.*

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L. K. Ananthakrishna Iyer

Shri L.K.Ananthakrishna Iyer was a pioneer in conducting ethnographic researches in southern India. His two volumes on Cochin Tribes and Castes(1909-1917), four volumes on the Mysore Tribes and Castes (1928-35) and his monograph on Syrian Christians (1926) are considered as

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monumental works (for a detailed bibliography of the contributions of L.K.Anathakrishn Iyer see Danda and Chakravarti 1991:6-11, and for other biographical notes see Ramdas 1986:281-92, Bala Ratnam 1991:11-16). His contribution to ethnography, dedication and devotion to the development of science was duly recognized by different institutions in particular by Calcutta University where he was appointed as a lecturer in Anthropology and Ancient History and Culture 1920- a position that he held till 1932-33. He presided over first Ethnographic session of Indian Science Congress Association in 1914. He was invited to many academic institutions abroad and was widely recognized as a scholar par excellence. Bala Ratnam and Kalyani Raj write ‘ In Kerala, none knew the tribes and castes better than Dr.Ananthakrishna Iyer and no wonder, for many years Anthropology in the country came to be known as “Iyer’s Science” and as “Ananthropology”’(1991:17).

The comparison of the ethnographic surveys conducted by Iyer and others during the colonial period and later in independent India would be odious but since K.S.Singh the former director general of the Anthropological Survey of India has himself done it I am taking the liberty of citing some statements from him which will help me later to highlight the issues which confront anthropology in particular. Singh writes that like other ethnographers of his time Iyer treated castes or tribes as isolates and did not describe its interaction and linkages with other groups and goes on to underline how in People of India(hereafter POI) project undertaken by the Anthropological Survey of India in 1985 was different in orientation(Singh 1991:38-450). It is pertinent to underline that he categorically states that POI could not use the term tribe or caste which are alien concepts and hence used community as a basis of study. The problem is that the term community has not been clearly defined. However, he has identified several cultural changes that have taken place in the Indian communities, such as occupations of many communities, marriage rituals/rules, family organization, opening up of economic opportunities etc. He observed that many life cycle rituals have been abridged or abandoned. Interestingly many groups have given up their old identities and have adopted new names and have created new myths about their status, also invite Brahmin priests to preside over the rituals. While commensal rules have been diluted there has been homogenization of sub-groups for the purpose of political mobilization. Role of caste councils either has diminished or abolished (ibid). As regards methodology and analysis of the data of POI there are several issues, besides instead of matching discreet items the focus should have been on the process. I leave this matter here.

Making of tribe

While we applaud monumental work done by Anathakrishna Iyer and others like him, we need to ask what the dominant interests of the ethnographers of that time in India were. We should be fully aware that those

were hey days of the colonial era and whatever was being produced in the name of ethnography cannot be separated from colonial interests and concerns. Of course the ethnographers themselves made routine statements about the objectives of their studies such as that they were promoting the cause of Science of Human beings and making efforts to record the rapidly vanishing cultures and also the variations. For discerning eyes this certainly is not enough, one will have to read in between lines. Elsewhere, I have made a strong case for native scholars to reread the anthropological literature produced during the colonial period with subaltern consciousness (Misra 2007:151-171). In that paper I have cited the case of James Wilkinson Breeks who wrote a celebrated book 'An Account of the Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilagiris' (1873). There I have shown that the then colonial government showed super haste in allowing Breeks, who was in Madras Civil Service and compiled the information while he was the Commissioner of the Nilgiris, to go ahead with the work. The question arises as to why such a haste and why the Indian Museum, Kolkata wanted to create a section in Indian Museum to illustrate arts and crafts among the aboriginal and other jungle 'races' which in itself could be considered a laudable objective but there is more to it when you further read that arts and crafts of those 'who have remained little affected by foreign civilization' is one of the causes for collection for museum. Here foreign civilization stands for larger Indian society.

On one hand the idea of evolution and creating stages of evolution¹ were the dominant thrust for the scholars to rush to different parts of the world to look evidence for those stages and on the other the colonist had assumed that the indigenous populations and the larger Indian societies were two different entities which could be out of ignorance as pointed out by Dumont and Pocock 'Up until about 1950...most professional ethnologists at work in India concerned themselves with tribes, i.e. with groups which they believed had escaped... the influence of Indian civilization. Just as if they were situated in Africa and Melanesia' (1957:8) but there is another angle to it as I pointed out in that paper (Misra 2007:151-171). In early 19th century the British in a very determined way were trying to establish their foothold in South India for which not only they were fighting wars but were also indulging in intrigues, alliances, making petty rulers to fight among themselves. Their area of administration too was enlarging. They had begun to take control of the forest and its resources. All this was causing a lot of unrest among the people in the region. Missionary activities too were in full flow. The need to know the fissures in the society and the sources of raw material for home industries etc., too was felt urgently. Of course it was felt necessary to know the people who were coming under their administrative control. The academic outcome of the exercise was merely a byproduct of the basic concern. This is not to undermine the curiosity generated in post enlightenment era to trace the origin of mankind, their dispersal and adaptation, and weave theories. For the colonial authorities, the colonial scholars and the colonial laity the indigenous people were

representatives of 'savages', 'half savages', 'primitive' etc. They were interesting for their exotic customs and also important for providing data for establishing the stages of evolution, and to push them away if it was perceived that they inhabited a region with potential or actual resources. In such an atmosphere, the term tribe was constructed with which we are still struggling to understand. The term was imposed on numerous people disregarding their long history and the role they played in the larger Indian society. I propose to get into this discussion in some detail.

Though the term tribe could be hardly defined, it persists and in India it has acquired a formal label, and constitutionally they are recognized as Scheduled Tribes. At one time one could say designating some people as tribe reduced the complexities of non-western societies of Africa, Asia, and America in the minds of colonists, administrators, missionaries and the western scholars. The term tribe has been used synonymous with the primitives or the people who could not develop and hence inferior². According to their understanding industrial or postindustrial west, in this formulation stood at one end of the pole and at the other end was the most backward segment of the humanity that is tribe. This kind of understanding gave them right to kill them indiscriminately, enslave them and displace them at will and to have control over the resources which the so called tribes had conserved for centuries. Although such Victorian and simplistic linear evolutionary scheme has been criticized, it remains in the background even in the informed anthropological discourses. The discourse on development exemplifies the hangover. If we reflect to consider as to how the concept of primitiveness emerged, we find that the attributes of primitive are non-literate, non-civilized, arrested in development, non-industrial, non-urban, lacking in economic specialization, having simple and small scale tools and so on. At some stage all human beings must have been at the same level. How is it that some broke out of those attributes and others could not? Was there any role of those who broke through in not allowing others to get out? This question is at once relevant for there are excellent monographs on the social formation of the primitives, their kinship structure, myths, beliefs, language etc., **but very little on the impact of expansionists on the people who have been called so. For that trijunction meeting point of three states namely Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Kerala, and in that particularly the sub-region of the Nilgiris provides appropriate illustration** (see Misra 2017: 363-394). It shows that throughout its long history the so called primitives, the food gatherers and hunters have been in contact with food producers. This is not only the story of the remote past, there is a continuity to it which got exceedingly intensified during the colonial rule and incidentally this is the period when such designated people were anthropologically studied intensively to bring out their social, cultural and physical attributes which surprisingly qualified them to be called as primitives!³ It was ironic that such categorization emerged and is continued to be rationalized. With some notable exception,

there has been indeed a sort of conspiracy of silence to discuss as to how such people were brought into the framework of State or putting the other way around what has been the contribution of such people to the development of the civilized state. Such questions have been continuously overlooked and scholars have persisted with 'parachute' notion of civilization/development that is as if the civilizations were dropped down from the sky.

Tribe as a concept

The term tribe is widely used despite the fact that there is hardly any clarity about it. It has been my hobby to ask fresh students in my classes, national and international, before they are exposed to the literature on tribes or influenced by my lectures, as to what images they have when the term tribe is uttered. Usually the answers have been that they are some kind of a 'primitive' people. When asked further about their notion of primitiveness, they invariably begin to fumble and are not able to proceed beyond stating that they lack many material aspects which are considered necessary for so called modern human beings. A few venture to state about their lack of 'proper' society or 'values' but without any prompting they themselves begin to realize a certain kind of vagueness of their statements, and show their eagerness to learn what I have to say about it. I have always found myself in a bind. For on one hand, there exists an enormous amount of literature on specific tribes and regions inhabited by them but much less on the concept of tribe or 'is hardly more rigorously defined in anthropological applications than in popular usage' (Fried 1975: 1). On the other, in the course of my lecture I would show great socio-cultural, economic, political and physical variety that exists among the people who have been called as tribe and yet I was not prepared to discuss as to why I continue to call them as tribe. The term is deeply entrenched into our vocabulary. Fried says that any attempt to reform the linguistic mode can be "virtuous, but quixotic" (ibid: 1). However, before I proceed to discuss what the term means in the Indian context, it is essential to demonstrate how determined are the non-tribal world to call some people as tribes and also its adjectival form tribal which means tribe like. It is paradoxical that while there is no clear meaning and understanding of the term, its adjectival form is freely used. As early as in 1942, it was pointed out by Swanton 'As to tribes, even a superficial study of them, whether in America or elsewhere, will quickly dispel the idea that they are simple or permanent units, and one soon discovers that they present the most bewildering combinations and contradictions. In short, there is no one universally valid principle identifying a body of people as a tribe, and tribes, or tribal groups varied so enormously as to dispose effectually of the idea that there was an immutability about them either in their origin or later development' (Swanton 1942: 183, quoted by Fried 1975: 108).

So the question arises as to why some people have been designated as tribe. Although there are excellent studies on individual communities called

as tribes, the question as to why they have been called as tribe is generally avoided. It has been generally assumed that since such communities do not have written records, they have been considered as people without 'history' and in common parlance without 'culture' and even if they have culture, it is so exotic as to call them 'headhunters', 'half naked', indulging in premarital sex and so on demonstrating how irrational and primitive they are. Of course, while these characteristics are highlighted the irrationality of the non-tribes is not discussed.

Fried devoted a whole book on the notion of tribe, in which he comprehensively demolished the concept of tribe. That was way back in 1975 but it hardly made an impact in the popular notion about tribe or in the academic discourse about it. It may be pertinent to repeatedly ask this question as to why be it so? It may not be possible to go into this question here but it will be legitimate to revisit his discussion and underline the main issues in the context of the main theme of this dissertation.

The word tribe

According to Oxford English Dictionary the derivation of the word 'tribe' is from the Latin word 'tribus'. According to Fried the word was used to indicate the two fold division of the people of Rome, but it lacked clarity that is even the earliest use of the word was not without being contentious and obscure. The use of the word tribe in English language could be traced back to 13th century which meant 'a primary aggregate of people in a primitive or barbarian condition'(Oxford English Dictionary Vol. IX, 1933: 339). Fried quotes Marx and Engels (1959: 252) where they have used the phrase 'sheep like or tribal consciousness' for tribes. Though there are some positive references about tribes such as that of Saraswati who thinks primitive tribes represent perfect form and are 'self organizing, self generating, self experiencing, and self perpetuating forms' (1991: 19). There are others who have made neutral uses of the term such as domestic groups, kin assemblage, local groups or mobile bands. But the strong notion that persists is that tribes are people different from the so called civilized people who are clearly indicated by such ideas as that the tribes are segmentary systems or pre-state people. Such ideas may have specific and apparent relevance but their applicability as a definite stage in the process of evolution can be challenged. The underlying assumption that those who have been called as tribes are the leftover of the earliest stage, while all others marched towards civilization leaves many questions unanswered. Fried argues that evolutionary framework is not only ambiguous but also highly generalized. Fried has shown that the persisting notion that the tribes are a breeding population is false and so also that each tribe speaks a distinct language. He has also shown that economic relations overflow the so called boundaries between tribes and non-tribes. Similarly political boundaries are much less clearer. Therefore Fried according to Beteille argues

that those who have been 'generally designated by anthropologists as tribes represent neither a definite type of society nor a definite stage of evolution. They are too amorphous and too assorted to qualify for either role. The tribe according to Fried, is much better regarded as a kind of secondary phenomenon which in the typical case acquires its form and identify from some external source' (1986: 305).

The idea that the people who have been called as tribe are secondary phenomenon is potentially strong. For evolution cannot be disputed. The journey of humankind since they became tool makers can be progressively reconstructed in a generalized way but specifics will remain clouded. The generalized image of the journey of humankind compels us to concede that changes call it by any name, progress or development is imminent. How it is triggered off can be speculated but cannot be precisely stated because too many variables are involved and different aspects of life do not respond to stimuli of change uniformly and with the same intensity. The story of change is complicated even for contemporary societies and to state about it for societies of remote past can at best remain at the level of speculation. Further, if change is imminent for all human groups how is this that some societies as it has been generally speculated remained entangled in the earliest form of social formation. This cannot be explained unless we take into account the external environment and external forces. In this regard, India provides an excellent opportunity to probe this question. For the history of India is long and within the framework of Indian civilization societies at different levels continue to exist side by side. Forest living communities have lived close to the centers of civilization, such as Gaya, Madurai, Ujjain (Beteille 1986: 300) and there are scores of such places all over Southern India- Tirupati and Sabarimala are the prominent ones. Fox has called them as 'professional primitives (1969), Morris as 'forest traders' (1982) and Gardner as 'oscillators between cultural frontiers' (1985). Therefore, it is imperative to discuss how tribes have been conceived in Indian situation.

Before we take up the issue of tribes in India it may be useful to give a critical view on the famous paper of Robert Redfield entitled 'The Folk Society' (1947) which became a sort of reference paper for discourse on tribe for generations of scholars. The concept of ideal primitive society is neither empirically correct nor acceptable from evolutionary perspective. Food production has evolved out of foraging and there must have been long period of transition. Besides in pre-industrial phase there has been substantial dependence of food producers on foragers which has not been duly recognized. Redfield conceives of an ideal primitive/folk society in contrast to modern urbanized Western society. Former according to him is small, isolated, non-literate and homogenous with a strong sense of group solidarity. In such a society 'behavior is traditional, spontaneous, uncritical and personal; there is no legislation or habit of experiment and reflection for intellectual ends...these

and related characterization may be related in terms of “folk mentality” (ibid; 293). With whatever knowledge we possess of the modern so called developed world is it possible to defend the idea that folk societies alone have the folk mentality? Much water has flowed since Redfield wrote that. Today our knowledge about the so called folk society is extensive and intensive and therefore it is easy to demolish the concept both in letter and spirit. Redfield’s concept of ideal type of primitive/folk society suffers with the bias of the civilization in the new world like modern America, Australia or New Zealand where the civilization did not grow with the interaction with the indigenous communities. Redfield’s concept does not take into account the situation in the older civilizations where the so called folk societies not only lived in close proximity with peasants and urban dwellers, interacted with them in variety of ways and in the process contributed to the development of civilization. Further the so called folk societies have persisted over time and have shown resilience and flexibility. They conserved the environment and respected autonomy of sorts. They developed appropriate tools and believed in social storage, egalitarianism and had lasting values.

Tribes in India

It will be most appropriate to start this discussion with what Saraswati has to say on the issue of the tribes in India. Saraswati is one of those Indian scholars though trained as an anthropologist like most of us, has tried to free himself of the colonial hangover and provides a perspective from Indian intellectual tradition. This perspective is important for Balagangadhara writes ‘in the last three hundred years, the theoretical and textual study of Indian culture has been undertaken mostly by Europe. What is more, it will also be a challenge because as I will argue, the study of India has largely occurred within the cultural framework of Europe’ (2012: 1). If I may add, the field of anthropology has been totally dominated by the Western scholars and their thoughts. Saraswati writes ‘There is nothing in Indian thought structure, nor in the traditional organization of Indian society, that may correspond to the Western evolutionary notion of tribe as a vestige of savagery and barbarism. Yet, tribe exists in India as a political category created by the British Raj, intellectualized by the colonial anthropologists and sanctified by the constitution of modern India. These so called pre-cultural groups properly speaking are the people of oral culture’ (1991: 63). The question arises as to when and how the term tribe began to be used in India. I have been trying hard to find a generic term for the tribe in Indian languages, in ancient Indian literature and mythologies but I have discovered none. At this stage, I am more concerned with the usage of the term tribe in India and therefore it has to start with the establishment of the colonial rule in India.

The present knowledge about the tribes in India began to appear in the notes prepared by stray European travelers, missionaries, colonial

administrators, planters and later official surveys were conducted on them by the colonial administrators. A bit of digression is necessary at this stage to understand the attitude of the Europeans towards the native populations. After the new world was discovered by the Europeans, they ran through the entire Americas and various islands in Atlantic Ocean, devastating the indigenous populations of those areas. They killed, maimed and displaced the indigenous populations from those habitats. Besides many other things, they started plantation in those areas in an unprecedented scale. Plantation economy could not have been successful without cheap labor. That changed the demography of those regions because labor was brought from outside in massive scale. That anxiety to harness labor resulted in introducing slavery in a big way in the so called modern 'civilized and rational world'. A large number of people from Africa were captured and enslaved, and sold to the planters and commercial agriculturists in the Americas and the various islands in the Atlantic Ocean. When the British entered India and were trying to consolidate their position in the country they were carrying with them the European attitude towards the indigenous populations. In the post enlightenment era, the west took it for granted that it had 'arrived' and the early man was savage and had been 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short' (Hobbes 1973: 64-65). For Hegel, savage was lazy. Karl Marx, the great thinker had no idea about the forest dwelling populations. He was completely possessed by the linear evolutionary thoughts. Morgan provided a lot of material for 'progressive' thinkers and philosophers who had classified human progress in terms of savagery, barbarism and civilization on flimsy and speculative data. Beteille writes that successors of Morgan and Durkheim chose their examples from Australia, Pacific islands and North America to illustrate the stages of evolution where there was clear disjunction between native populations and the civilization that was appearing (1986: 298). In fact if I may add it was imposed on the natives. However, such speculative classification became the basis for discourse for generations of scholars all over the western world and those who studied under their system and guidance. Nilsson writes, 'the savage has few others than material wants, and then he endeavors to satisfy for the moment He thinks and acts for the day which is not the day which is coming' (1868: IXIV-IXV). Such an attitude has continued to dominate the discourse on people considered as tribes.

Echo of the similar attitude

Earlier, I have referred to James Wilkinson Brecks book, 'An account of the Primitive Tribes and Monument of the Nilgiris'. This book was edited by his wife and posthumously published by Allen and Co. on behalf of the India Museum, London 1873. In preface his wife writes that originally it was designed to print twelve or fifteen copies for the Madras Government but after his death the publication in the extended form was done on the orders of the Madras Government. In other words, originally, the book was meant only for the administrators. We do not know what the qualifications of Brecks were but

the text clearly indicates his keen interest in Anthropology and Archeology, and in capturing details of people and places. His wife further writes that they have done their best in checking and in rechecking the details which however was not easy owing to incoherent statements of the half-savage people utterly unused to describing their own habits and practices and often very suspicious of interrogations (1873: iii). There is nothing surprising in this statement because W.H.R. Rivers who came much later to the Nilgiris was a trained ethnographer and wanted to test his genealogical method, wrote that the Toda had no aesthetic sense and they made their houses at beautiful spots not because of their beauty but for functional reasons. This he wrote about the people who love music, wrap their bodies with beautiful shawls embroidered by their women, construct their dwellings in intricate manner which can easily withstand rigors of nature and systematically maintain their habitats. They compose songs for all occasions (Misra 2007: 152). The Toda are one of those people who have a complex social organization and world view which have attracted the attention of the scholars the world over and yet to call them tribe meaning primitive shows extreme bias. This is extremely surprising as it comes from people who laid foundation of anthropology and trained generations of scholars in the discipline. Returning back to Brecks, he writes about the Irula who are one of the major tribal populations in Tamilnadu and have a long history, 'at all events, there is no reason to suppose that they were ever anything but a jungle race, and it is needless to say that they have no tradition of their own' (1873: 71). This observation is surprising as it comes after he has briefly discussed their religious beliefs and social practices. The bias and smugness of the commissioner are apparent, are further illustrated when he writes 'it was with great difficulty, I could get male and female names out of the Irulas whom I brought to my tent, as the most intelligent that could be found. It was not that they had any objection to give information, but simply that their limited range of experience had not acquainted them with names enough. After at least an hour's reflection during which they were evidently taxing their memories to the utmost, they could only enumerate eight women's names' (ibid: footnote at page 71). Brecks did not realize that being taken to the commissioner's tent escorted by armed guards must have been a dreadful experience for the forest dwelling Irula and being questioned about their women folk by a set of officers who were operating through multiple interpreters must have required some wits on the part of the Irula to give so little information to the powerful strangers.

There is another way to look into this issue: as to how the knowledge is formed and recalled among certain groups of people, particularly foragers. For such people, knowledge does not hang independently of all other things. It is gained through experience and relating the objects around them. Bird-David (1999: S67-91, 2004: 406-21, Bird-David and Naveh (2008: 55-73), Naveh & Nurit Bird-David (2014: 74-92) and David Naveh (2007) have done some seminal work on how the knowledge is generated, developed and retained among the forest

dwelling populations. They have shown that in the case of forest dwelling Nayaka, a Scheduled Tribe in southern region, the authoritative way of knowing environment is by establishing relationship. According to Naveh, Nayaka 'perceive and relate with people, forest animals, forest trees, forefathers, deities and hills, within the framework of relational epistemology' (ibid: 249). However, my purpose here was to highlight the attitude of the then scholars trained within the framework of European colonial ideology towards the indigenous populations. They took it for granted that such people were basically simple minded, their capacities of comprehension were limited; they had short range concept of time and had no capability of abstract thinking. The symbols they created, stories they wove, carvings or paintings they made appeared to be of no consequence to such scholars. It is not that the attempts to classify people in neat categories on the basis of a few traits have died out, it continues to dominate the discourse even at present times, in spite of the fact that researchers have overwhelmingly indicated otherwise. The echo of what Nilsson wrote in 1868 is reflected in such categorization as **immediate and delayed return economic systems** (Woodburn 1980: 95-117). What is amazing is that this categorization has been hugely and affirmatively cited in anthropological literature, giving an impression as if the modern scholars at last have found a critical difference between food gatherers and hunters (here after FGH), and non FGH, overlooking their own observations and immense data that have been collected on the so called tribal populations from different parts of this world. For instance, Woodburn himself writes, 'I do not believe that a hunting and gathering way of life can be instantly created by any set of individuals who choose to start to live by hunting and gathering. The development of the complex knowledge, skills and social relationships necessary to exploit any habitat efficiently by hunting and gathering, while maintaining adequate nutrition and relative stability of population numbers and density can be achieved over a time-span of many generations' (1980: 96). In other words, what he is saying is that the FGH like any other human beings are thinking beings. They cannot survive in the hostile environment in which they have been pushed into and 'encapsulated' without developing appropriate knowledge of the environment, the necessary skills, appropriate technology and ability to connect different variables and above all keeping an eye on the future supply lines. The latter aspect is extremely important both for their own survival and conservation of the environment they live in. Woodburn writes 'all contemporary hunters and gatherers are highly skilled and selective users of their environment: choices are constantly being made about which animals to hunt and which vegetables to gather. These choices have an effect on the future availability of the resources.....Hunters and gatherers may control their future food supplies by culling game animal selectively, by operating restrictions on hunting which have the effect of providing a close season, by using vegetable sources with discretion and replanting portions of root so that the plants regenerate, by extracting only part of the honey from wild bees' nests so that the sites are not deserted and many other similar techniques of conservation

which suggest that the distinction between hunting and gathering as a system of unplanned extraction, and cultivation as system of planned production is not valid. Some hunting and gathering techniques –the making of stockades, pit traps, weirs, dams etc., - may even involve more substantial planned capital investment that is usual in simple system of agriculture not involving irrigation’ (ibid: 101). I have deliberately quoted this long passage because not only it is profound based on accurate observations but it also contradicts the categories that he himself has developed. He makes a distinction between two types of economic systems namely those in which the return for labor is delayed and those in which it is, in general, immediate. This categorization raises several issues. How much immediate is immediate and delayed is delayed. Among FGH certain activities give immediate results some others not so immediately. Then the knowledge to gather and hunt is developed over a period of time and also the skills that are required for successful gathering and hunting. There are certain things they may like to consume immediately; there are others which they may store. The Jarawa, the classical food gatherer and hunter from Andaman & Nicobar Islands, store honey in very well designed wooden buckets secured with leaves. The Jarawa spend considerable time in fashioning their hunting tools which they carefully maintain (see Sarkar 1990). Categorizing people as immediate return people paints them as if they are ready to devour as soon as they smell food. Such categorization overlooks their ability to think, develop cognitive mapping of the environment they live in and beyond, ability to innovate, efforts they make to circumvent the hurdles and develop concepts based on their experiences. Also overlooked are their sense of adventure, curiosity to explore the region beyond their own habitation, their sense of romance and entertainment. Also overlooked are their sense of beauty and attempt to decorate their self with whatever little they may possess. The Jarawa make beautiful tassels out of barks and wear them with so much pride. They create symbols and attach meanings to them which may be complex as the same symbols may have multiple meanings which make it difficult for the outsiders to interpret them adequately. For instance, the idea of immediate return economic system does not pay attention to the profound investment of time and energy in resources they have collected or hunted but share them with family and others and also conserve them for future use. Sharing of resources, raw or cooked food between the members of a band is what I call a system of **social storage**, which is much more secure than physical storage and has profound social value. Similarly, conservation of resources not only ensures their supply on sustainable basis but is morally sound and bestows humanistic meaning to resources of nature. The categorization also overlooks deep philosophical thinking behind their simple ways of life. Gardner who spent considerable time in doing fieldwork among the Paliyans writes, ‘it startled me that Paliyans treat fellow humans so considerably that my year and half with them was unforgettable. They were quieter, more peaceful, more respectful, more egalitarian, and more individualistic than any people I had ever met or read about. Being extreme in all these dimensions,

Paliyans were “on the edge” in behavior as in geography. Forty-two years later I have yet to see a society approximating theirs in individualism, not even in the proudly individualistic United States. Portraying Paliyans this way makes them sound like those hypothetical, ideal people social philosophers and political theorists love to write about. It also gives the impression that, it would be easy to live and work in their utopia’ (2006: 30).

The idea of immediate and delayed return systems if at all is a perspective and if that perspective is extended, who can say that modern economic system has any long term vision. It is just a question of how time span is measured. The way the modern societies are extracting the natural resources of this planet, it does not require much courage to say that ‘delayed return people’ have no vision for tomorrow. The modern societies even if they have some concern for tomorrow, they are helpless on account of the severe competition they have generated and also the way they have promoted consumerism which in turn generates waste which has now the capacity to sink civilizations. Considering the time human beings have been on this earth they have instead become ‘**instant return**’ people on this planet.

Isolationist and interdependent models

There is a continuing popular perspective which also persists among the scholars that the tribes are isolated people and the more primitive a tribe is, such as FGH, the more isolated it has been. In this respect the debate that was generated by Headland and Reid in 1989 and subsequently Bailey and Headland took up the issue again in 1991 with more data. That discussion is relevant to refer as it is instructive for understanding the situation of tribes in India but I cannot go in detail here. Suffice to state that humans have always been resource managers to some extent and therefore it would be more appropriate to conceptualize a continuum from foraging to purposeful forest clearing and crop cultivation. However, it is true that in the process of evolution, domestication of animals and plants came later and therefore it is conceivable that at some stage foraging survived independently. But the concept of continuum from foraging to food production allows understanding the relationships between the two. It allows us to conceptualize that evolution of cultivation and domestication of animals from food gathering and hunting was a continuous and long drawn process and even when cultivation and domestication got stabilized, the former did not get eclipsed, and each did not become independent of the other. In India forest remained an important source of resources as well as reservoir for gaining spiritual nourishment. This discussion successfully exposes the hollowness of the concept of isolation.

Who are the people called ‘tribes’

The question, who are the people called ‘tribes’ in India was intensively perused during the colonial period when people of India for a variety of reasons

became a subject matter of the colonial administration, missionaries and scholars. Numerous theories of division in Indian society were propounded based on speculation, partial evidences from history, literary sources, folklore, physical features and linguistic correlations. As the knowledge about India and its people progressed, no theory was found to be good enough to define the people called tribes. These speculative theories had one positive effect that it prompted detailed studies on the so called tribes of India. In modern India the tribes are the most studied people. These studies have shown that the people who have been called as tribes are found in all regions of India. They differ from one another in physical features, religion, language, social organization, occupational specialization, belief-patterns, and population sizes. There are tribes who claim to be Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, Muslims and others who identify themselves with their own religions. **The problem of the problems has been that there is no common thread unifying all the groups who have been called as tribes.** This is a subject that has been discussed quite at length. But it is clear from earlier discussions on the concept of tribe that it is not possible to define tribe objectively. There is a certain kind of predisposition in calling some people as tribe and that **they have to be distinguished from other populations.** In India, there is an additional emphasis of making a distinction between tribe and caste. Caste has complex hierarchical social structure. There is persistent jostling among castes to gain a higher rank in the caste structure which is correlated with power equation. It has been noted that some tribes claim a status in caste structure but the distinction between the two at middle and lower levels has not always been clear cut. However, in this regard it is worth quoting in full what Bates and Shah wrote, 'It was not until the middle of nineteenth century that colonial officials began to routinely distinguish between the castes and tribes of India. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, a distinction was being recognized amongst the colonial officials between hill and forest communities and those of the plains. However, as Ajay Skaria argues, it was not until the 1840s that groups such as the Bhils began to be more consistently referred to as "aboriginal, forest or hill tribes" (Skaria 1997). Colonial accounts increasingly narrated a story of invasions and retreat – that the Hindu Aryan invaders had forced the original inhabitants of India, its aboriginal tribes, into hilly and forested parts of the country – and by the 1860s the distinction between caste and tribes had been crystallized' (2014: 2-3). Not without political and administrative reasons colonial administrators and census operators had reduced the Indian population to tribe and caste entities (see Beteille: 2000), as if there were no other groupings or individual thrusts. Most of the time, the designation of some groups in India as castes and others as tribes depended on difference in perception of 19th century British writers. On this issue Hockings, a specialist on the Nilgiris' ethnography has something very interesting to say, 'Hill tribes and jungle tribes like the Todas and the Kurumbas were portrayed in sympathetic light by the romantic but anthropologically

untrained British writers' (2012; 842). Hockings raises the question as to why this was so and himself proceeds to answer by saying 'could it be that the Todas and the Kurumbas shared with the upper-class British residents of the Nilgiri Hills the most favored "sporting" haunts of the latter namely the mountains and forests' (ibid: 843). Further, he concludes, 'In fact, it is hardly exaggerating to say that there has been a strong tendency in South Asia to claim that social groups living over 1000 m. above sea-level are tribes, while groups below that are castes' (ibid: 843). By way of illustration Hockings has shown that 'tribe' and 'caste' terms have been loosely and haphazardly used; sometimes the Badagas of the Nilgiri Hills have been referred to as a 'tribe' or 'hill tribe' and at other times as 'Hindu Race'. Citing numerous examples he concludes 'In fact, the labeling of any Indian community as a tribe or as a caste could often be traced back to the mere stylistic whim of the 19th Century administrator. The two words "tribe" and "caste" have been used so loosely in India that it would seemingly be better for anthropologists to avoid using them altogether' (ibid: 843).

This statement is in complete contrast to the scholarly debate that was generated to distinguish tribe from caste by scholars such as Bose (1941), Sinha (1962; 1965; 1981), Bailey (1961), Dumont (1962) to name only a few. In spite of so much contrasting views regarding the term tribe in relation to caste, and his own views on the two terms just quoted above, Hockings is not prepared to accept that tribe caste distinction is a non-issue in objective sense (see Misra 1977a). The enormous writings on the Nilgiris show that once the Nilgiris was discovered by the agents of the East India Company, it became a hunting ground for European missionary activities. Later the colonial power developed it as a health resort for British soldiers, introduced plantation and commercial agriculture for export. In the process they persistently kept on displacing indigenous inhabitants of the area, exploited the resources and labor of the local as well as of neighboring populations for trade and commerce, quickly developed road connectivity and laid down the famous Nilgiri rail lines at the enormous cost and destruction of fauna and flora apart from 'looting' the Indian wealth' (see Tharoor where he observes 'Indian railways were a big scam The British shareholders made absurd amount of money..'). All such activities peripheralized the indigenous populations and also encouraged slavery directly and indirectly. It also became a safe haven for scholars to descend on the Nilgiris and conduct a variety of studies which of course enriched the knowledge of the region and also about the people and society, but in the process they earned their name, fame and prosperity and helped the British administration to exploit the local resources and strengthen their control. This statement may sound petty to the British sympathizers but I want to draw attention to two factors. All that what was being done in the Nilgiris was not done to promote the interests of the local population or of the region. The demand for such activities were located somewhere else. Just one example will suffice. Think of laying down the railway line from Mettupalayam to Ooty

(old name of the modern Udthagamandalam) was no doubt an engineering marvel at that time but the question is, was it being done in the interest of the local population or for the development of the region? It is also relevant to state that in the huge writings and even in the scholarly works of the Nilgiris the interests of the subaltern are not visible. It was a kind of blind spot and prejudice towards the people identified as primitives. There were hardly any studies attempting to assess social, economic, political, psychological and ecological impact of the colonial rule in the Nilgiris. It will be appropriate to suggest that while discussing the social structure of the Nilgiris the presence of the European population should also be added. They not only became the ruler but also set standards of living, discrimination and introduced new ethos in intercommunity relations. However, this needs to be noted and underlined that in spite of the fact that the people who have been called as tribe and have undergone through tremendous vicissitudes and exploitation **have been able to retain their identities**, howsoever precarious it may have been. This is a feature which is extremely important to understand the inner dynamics of the individual groups, their abilities to negotiate, establish alliances across groups to promote their interests and also show their entrepreneurial skills (See Norstrom 2003).

Having taken the position that the tribes were different from the rest of the Indian population the task before the then scholars was to establish that they were linguistically and racially different. Linguists consider that the languages spoken in the sub-continent of India belong to one of the five language families namely Indo-European, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, Sino-Tibetan and Andamanese. However, in spite of this classification they came to the conclusion that India be considered as a linguist area (Emeanu 1956, 1974, Pandit 1972, 1979; 171, Subbarao 2012:43). The sustained researches of the linguists also establish that the most distinguishing feature of the Indian linguistic situation is its grass root level bilingualism and multilingualism. This observation is reinforced by Subbarao and Annamalai who state that multilingualism is not an exception but a norm in South Asian subcontinent (2012:19, Annamalai 2001:57). Multilingualism implies intense language contact for a long period of time as a result of which characteristic features of one language family may be transferred to another language. Subbarao further asserts that though the languages of the sub-continent belong to different language families their syntactic features are identical (2012:42). Thus linguistically a separate identity of the tribes cannot be established.

The earlier scholars had taken for granted that the racially tribes were different from the rest of the population which prompted physical anthropologists to undertake extensive researches, in the process they generated enormous amount of data which could not provide a coherent and neat racial profile of Indian population. However taking into account of the long history of India and various other characteristic features of the Indian

population it can be safely stated that it has immense diversity. The story as to how this diversity has come about is too complex and perhaps can never be explained though there is enough evidence to suggest that there have been waves and waves of mini and major, internal and external migrations for a variety of reasons. Of course a group of scholars are so possessed by the idea that a group of Indo- European language speakers calling themselves as Aryans migrated to India and colonized it. They believe that genetic researches are settling the Aryan migration debate though the data they have at their command is so thin.

However, Gadgil et al (1997) attempted to explain the biological and ethnographic diversity of the entire country based on technological innovation, genetics, language and archeological evidences, come to the conclusion that it is owing to a series of migrations. They further argue that in other lands the dominant human cultures have tended to absorb or eliminate others, in India the tendency has been to isolate and subjugate the subordinated cultures thereby augmenting cultural diversity. **Further they make a profound statement that the tendency to nurture diversity has been favored by the country's ecological regimes which certainly should be taken note of and discussed.** Here, I would like to argue that establishing dominance to have control over resources and labor of the subjugated population is understandable but an important question is as to what has been the response of the subjugated populations. This question is relevant in understanding the situation of a large number of tribal communities inhabiting forest and hill areas of the country. How did they deal with the dominant cultures? It will be difficult to concede that they were uniformly submissive and accepted their condition. This is unacceptable simply because the period and regions involved are huge. It may also be stated that within a region there are significant variations. One reaches to a painful conclusion that the historians have presented the history of dominant cultures which unfortunately continues to be so even now to a large extent. It is only in the recent past that some historians have tried to rewrite history which has been called as subaltern perspective. The anthropologist on their part could have presented an authentic version of local histories but they were more interested in 'softer' aspects of cultures which are amply illustrated by the enormous literature on the Nilgiris produced by the anthropologists and linguists. Dominance established by the Europeans in the Nilgiris and its consequences on the people and region and people's reactions on the assault on their culture and resources have never been a topic for discussion. It was taken for granted that their mighty presence in the region was neutral for the people they were studying.

Indian society and its ethos

Having discussed futility of the tribe as a concept, and designating some as tribes in India on the basis of a few evidences, I propose, to discuss the place of

those people who have been called as tribes in Indian society and their articulation with its ethos. The term tribe is deeply entrenched into our vocabulary in spite of the fact that there is hardly any clarity about it, except that there is a sort of general agreement that they represent backward segment of the humanity. As against this there are some positive assertions too like that of Saraswati who thinks that primitive tribes represent perfect form. His views are certainly at variance with the commonly held views about tribes but compel us to deeply reflect that if his observations were not right then how we explain the fact that in spite of all odds some primitive tribes have survived. They live close to nature which is based on the principle of self organizing systems. Is it because they have developed technologies, concepts and values which are in conformity with nature? This is a serious point involving many variables that cannot be settled in a hurry. It requires introspection and debate about the progress human beings have made since they acquired human form and the direction modern humanity has taken in the name of development and progress. We leave this matter here.

Even if we agree with Saraswati and concede that tribes represent a perfect form the fact is that from the materialistic point of view, the people who have been now called as the Scheduled Tribes in India 'are among the poorest and most marginalized sections of Indian society. Although, numerically they are only about 8.6 per cent, they disproportionately represent the people living below poverty line, are illiterate and suffer from extremely poor physical health' (Ministry of Tribal Affairs 2014: 25). This is the situation in modern India where after the colonial rule was extinguished there have been formal plans for their development and protection for which huge budgetary provisions have been progressively made. But what was the situation before the country became independent. Indeed that is a long period but there is a significant date line in Indian history defined by the establishment of the colonial rule. It is during the colonial period that the modern category of tribe emerged when they also lost their traditional rights on land, commons and forest. During this period the dominant view that emerged was that the tribe formed a separate category of people as compared to the rest of the people, and also that they have been generally isolated population. It is true that in the pre-colonial period there was no generalized category of tribes. Therefore it is imperative to repeatedly raise the question as to who were the tribes and what their place was in the Indian society and seek their answers from different vantage points. This issue has been discussed in some details above. The decisive opinion that emerges is that the people who have been called as tribes have not been consistently isolated. Therefore they have to be seen in the framework of the larger Indian society and its ethos in which they have been ever embedded and have grown together in and out of each other. Let me try to explain as to why such a consideration is essential.

Food gatherers to food producers

Food gathering and hunting was the first adaptation human beings

made. Food production and domestication of animals evolved out of it. It is logical to assume that there must have been a long period of transition between foragers and food producers. It has been discussed earlier that the two did not live independently of each other. It is very well established that early man lived in India. It has been convincingly established by several archeological studies that it is wrong to view forager as primitive isolates (see Lukacs 1990: 185). Sinha had written, 'it is generally agreed that for several thousands of years *Atabika Janas* (forest people) have been in contact with the encroaching and engulfing plough cultivation based Brahmanical Varna-*Jati* civilization and that numerous hitherto isolated and autonomous groups have been absorbed in the body of the civilization' (1981: 2). Sinha drew our attention to Kroeber's famous Huxley Memorial Lecture 'The Ancient Oikumene, as an historic cultural aggregate' (1952). In this lecture Kroeber had clearly stated, 'Finally the primitives in the area or adjoining it, derive their culture mainly from the civilization characteristics of the Oikumene as a whole through reductive selection. They preserve old elements which their retardation makes them unable or unwilling to accept. Basically, however, these retarded or primitive cultures in or adjacent to the Oikumene are fully intelligible only in terms of "Oecumenical" civilization. They usually add to what they share some lesser measure of their own proper peculiarities and originations, and they have often developed distinctive style of their own. But in the main these backward cultures, depend and derive from greater ones whose nexus we have been considering' (ibid: 391). This position was more stoutly stated by Moreman '....A Southeast Asian Society's membership in the set called "tribal" can be described, defined and analyzed only in terms of that society's contrast to civilized society which it may fight, serve, mimic or even become.....but which it can never ignore.... In Southeast Asia, the categories "tribal" and "civilized" each implies and defines the other...' (1968: 164). This suggests that it would be erroneous to discuss regional history in terms of evolution from tribe to state, since tribes exist only in the context of a state system of social relations which includes them; states exist by coming in terms with tribes (as social types). Roy Burman made a series of speculative observations on tribe-civilization relationship as dependent historic structures (see 1969, 1970). Beteille in his introduction of N.K. Bose's book *The Structure of the Hindu Society* had observed, 'No one who studies even the tiniest segment of the Indian society can afford to forget that India is a country of more than 500 million people with recorded history of nearly three thousand years. This is the broad context within which, anthropological fieldwork in India must be placed' (1975: 2). This he had written to emphasize, along with Bose, Dumont and Pocock, the necessity of bringing together the approaches of ethnography and Indology to understand the Indian society. Reviewing different approaches which have been adopted while discussing food gathering and hunting societies as isolated or integrated, Bird-David a specialist on food gathering and hunting societies of south India proposed 'internal relationships (between Naikens)

and external relationship (between Naikens and others) are both integral to hunter-gatherer social life' (1988: 17).

Reviewing inter-tribal relations in India, I came to the conclusion that tribes cannot be considered as isolated population. Whenever efforts to search for inter-community relations were explored, it showed a regional pattern of structured relations. These patterns show various points of articulation with larger Indian society, particularly the caste system (Misra 1977b: 116-7). This study, in other words suggested that tribes in India need to be considered as a part of the regional social, cultural, political, economic and linguistic set up.

In the long history of India, the country experienced waves after waves of religious and spiritual movements of local, regional and supra regional significance. Many of these movements such as those of Buddhism, Jainism, Bhakti as well as Gandhi's in modern times were universal in their approach trying to spread the message of peace, non-violence and coexistence with people and nature. Besides, there were movements to gain control over land and resources. Maharaja Bhupendra Chandra Sinha, in his autobiographical account has described how a group of people from Kanauj (in modern Uttar Pradesh) travelled all the way to distant north-east India in 13th Century and got a foothold in the area inhabited by the forest dwelling Garos. When they were too troubled by the indigenous Garos they took the help of the kings in Delhi by agreeing to pay tribute to them. Eventually through various acts of intrigue and maneuvering they were able to establish their kingdom there which got disintegrated only after the British entered the area in the 19th Century (1965: 137-155). This does not seem to be an isolated incident considering the history of widespread migration of different linguistic communities from one region to the other for a variety of reasons including for establishing some territorial rights in the areas which were considered to be 'weak' or not administered. In this regard the story of the migration of the Badaga, a community of peasants, from the plains of Mysore to the hilly and forested regions of the Nilgiris inhabited by the indigenous populations is illustrative and instructive more so because authentic studies are available particularly owing to the sustained work done by Hockings (see his latest book on the Badaga social history 2013 and for other references on the Nilgiris including his two part Encyclopedia 2012).

Badaga in Nilgiris

The story of the Badaga who migrated from Mysore region is illustrative in many ways. Between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries they migrated to the Nilgiris plateau in several waves and settled on land 'in part granted to them by a council of men from the indigenous Toda, Kota and Kurumba tribes' (Hockings 1980: 45). Hockings has described in detail their settling down in the different regions of Nilgiri plateau. He writes 'they cleared land, scattered their hamlets across the rolling hills and took to a mixed economy

which was augmented by some hunting and swidden cultivation. What they needed but did not themselves produce was either obtained from the neighboring Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas or trader Chettis or bought in market near the foothills of the Nilgiris, usually by bartering homegrown millets' (ibid: 239). Hockings has discussed in detail the kind of relationship they established with the indigenous communities. In course of time they prospered. Their population which was only 2207 in 1812 grew rapidly. It was 134,514 in 2001 (Hockings 2013: Appendix 2). It was with the arrival of the British, the scenario in the Nilgiris changed rapidly owing to the 'introduction of local market, a cash economy and a demand for labor and vegetable. But this was enough to trigger a rise in the fortunes of the community and also to prompt a remarkable increase in the size of the Badaga population (Hockings 1980: 240). Quoting Grigg Hockings writes that each year the area of cultivation and permanent occupation of the land by the Badaga increased and so also their wealth, and extension of plantation (ibid: 241). Commercial cultivation that began in Nilgiri region with the establishment of the colonial rule received a big boost owing to World War 1 which resulted in improvement in road and rail connectivity. The Badaga shifted the emphasis in their farming from millets to potato and tea. Hocking writes 'These new directions in the farm economy were fully in evidence by 1930, at which time most of the Badaga broke off their time honored exchange relationship with the Kotas, Todas and Kurumbas and began to seek the artifacts these tribesmen made in town markets instead' (ibid: 242).

Bhumij case

In this respect the detailed studies conducted by Sinha among the Bhumij in Manbhum region is also instructive. He writes, 'The acculturation of the Bhumij, a Hinduised Bengali speaking offshoot of the Munda of Ranchi....however can hardly be described **as a case of conjunction between two historically discrete cultural system.** It appears to be more like one of interaction between a relatively advanced (peasant) and a relatively simple economically isolated (primitive or tribal) dimension of a single socio-cultural and historic field. The Bhumij transformation scene appears to represent essentially, **a case of development of a tribal society to the level of peasantry through gradual dissolution of ecological barrier of forest-clad hilly lands between them and the so-called Hindu peasantry'** (emphasis mine Sinha 1957: 23). This is an extremely important observation which is in conformity with the discussion carried out in the section 'Who are the people Called 'tribes''. Sinha has been consistent in holding this view. His other paper written in the same year but published in 1958 was 'Tribal Cultures of India as a dimension of little tradition in the study of Indian civilization: a preliminary statement' (1958: 504-518) where he takes a radically different view as opposed to the dominant prevailing view that tribal cultures represent a relatively untransformed section of the original primitive culture. He takes

the view that tribal cultures provided the raw material that contributed to the development of Indian civilization. I will return to this paper shortly but let it be stated that Sinha through a systematic analysis of the historical, social, cultural, economic data shows that the Bhumij interacted with a large number of ethnic groups of the region and contributed to the regional development.

The few cases cited above though separated by thousands of miles show some remarkable similarities. These studies indicate that in the long history of India there have been frequent movements of populations from one region to the other often overcoming the long distances, geographical barriers, cultural and linguistic boundaries. Long term studies of Hockings among the Badaga in the Nilgiris and of Sinha among the Bhumij in Manbhum region trace transformation of status of groups through social and cultural interactions with different groups. Of course the situation in the Nilgiris which in the extant literature has been basically considered as a tribal region got significantly altered on account of sudden appearance of an alien European population which acquired power. The activities generated by them made massive impact on economy, demography, communication and ecology of the region. However, unlike the Badaga, the Europeans though dominated in almost all spheres of life pretended to remain aloof of the social and cultural fabric of the region. I should add that the detailed study of the Toda by Walker clearly establishes that the **'record of history, however scant, shows that the Nilgiris were involved, if only on the fringes, in the polity of wider region which included several important centers of South Indian Hindu civilization'** (emphasis mine 1986: 294). After a detailed examination of the matrix of the Toda society and inter community relationship there, he comes to the conclusion 'they were based on ritual and economic specialization, and the specialized endogamous units were ordered into a hierarchy on the basis of relative ritual purity. These concepts-specialization, endogamy, hierarchy and relative purity- are of course, those which inform traditional Hindu society throughout the subcontinent, from Kashmir in the far north to Cape Comorin in the extreme south' (ibid: 295).

Returning to the observations of Sinha, it is not only that the Bhumij who are relatively more acculturated but other tribes of the region too contributed to the social and the cultural framework of the region. Sinha carried these thoughts further in his paper referred to earlier. It is remarkable and indeed bold that Sinha took the position that tribal cultures were a strand in understanding Indian civilization. Although he conceded that the tribal belt of central and southern India region was huge in terms of area as well as number of people and also had a complex and a long history; the articulation of the tribes with the larger universe of Indian civilization was relatively restricted and interrupted, but 'in not a single case is the community completely shut off from the contact with what we call the great culture community of India' (ibid:

504). These tribal communities everywhere had been in touch with the traditional network of relationship based on 'reciprocity, equality, super ordination – subordination, competition and accommodation' (Sinha 1957: 32), and in observance of rituals and festivals, in establishing ceremonial friendship besides economic transactions. They supplied forest resources to the larger community which included supply of elephants that acquired an important position in Indian society. The tribes protected and maintained frontier areas, playing bridge and buffer roles between powerful states. They played the role of interpreters and also looked after sacred Hindu centers located deep inside the forests and atop hills. On the basis of these discoveries, Sinha came to the conclusion that these tribal communities, fall within 'social field' of the Great Tradition of India but he cautioned that to determine whether they fall within the 'ideological field' of the Great Tradition or not needed closer examination.

Based on the analysis of these features Sinha highlighted the common denominators and also the discontinuity between the little communities of tribes and the Hindu peasantry. His overall conclusion was 'within the limitations of our present endeavor, as mentioned above, we may say that we have been able to demonstrate the possibility of **orthogenetic development of Indian civilization from a primitive cultural level roughly comparable to cultures of the un-aculturated tribes of Peninsular India. We have pointed vital elements of continuity between tribal cultures and Hindu traditions.** We have also been able to isolate some potential elements of transition in the direction of peasant cultures in tendencies towards feudalization, stratification, specialization of roles and so on' (1958: 517 emphases are mine).

Relational epistemology

Sinha's initial predilection that tribal cultures present raw material of the core dimension of the Indian civilization get further validated by the research work of Bird-David and her student Naveh who have been doing research among the food gathering and hunting groups in southern India (referred to earlier). In a series of papers she has discussed the authoritative way of knowing and learning among the Nayaka, a forest dwelling community which she calls as relational epistemology (1999: 77-79; 2004: 414-418). Now her student David Naveh, has been carrying out the work on the same people around the same locale in order to find out whether relational epistemology is still an authoritative way of knowing among the Nayaka when there have been significant changes in the economic circumstances and in the ecology of the region. Naveh finds that Nayaka perceive and relate with people, forest animals, forest trees, forefathers, deities and hills, within the framework of relational epistemology. They perceive, think and engage with these human and non-human forest dwellers as persons with unique personalities' (2007: 249). Naveh further elaborates this by stating that the Nayaka 'is attuned to

find out how these persons are with them (in relation context like joint living and care taking) rather than finding out these persons' essential characteristics, irrespective of actual relations' (ibid: 249). He makes an extremely important point when he observes knowing is important but its relevance is in maintaining the relationship which comes through acquiring *budhi* which does not necessarily mean knowledgeable. It transcends the physicality of knowledge, it is wisdom and understanding in the context of the relationship Nayaka establish with their environment. According to Naveh, Nayaka regard forest animals as co-subjects. Often they approach forest animals by speech. They often try to resolve the conflicts with animals by addressing the concerned animal and emphasizing that together they are co-dweller in the forest. He further shows that this way of perceiving and knowing the universe around them undergoes changes when their relationship with these objects undergoes changes as with domesticated animals or with cultivated plants.

Budhi (*buddhi* in Sanskrit) as understood by the Nayaka is gained through experience and being together with humans and non-humans which provide them with 'critical' knowledge. For that it is essential that one observes by being with someone who is performing what one wishes to know while someone is doing it and also to do what one wishes to know by oneself which may involve a process of experimentation. Let me quickly point out that such understanding does not remain static. Naveh and Bird-David in their latest paper (2014) have demonstrated 'how persons become things' as the context for the Nayaka has been changing. I may further argue that people like Nayaka have never been living in their isolated world. Norstrom in a brilliant paper has shown through a case study of an erstwhile food gatherer and hunter, his entrepreneurial endeavors striking to compete with peasantry thereby Norstrom questions putting such population in straight jacket predetermined models. He writes 'many Paliyans are very willing to be active in the process of "political learning" whereby they re-evaluate old values and habits in new ways, to achieve new goals in line with their new aspirations. We can conclude that these kinds of negotiations seem to dominate their interaction with the wider society of to-day in the same way as I feel it does for similar groups all over South India, and therefore "political representation" becomes a key issue' (2014: 468). My purpose is to indicate that *buddhi* is widely used word in Indian languages and has many shades of meaning but essentially it makes a distinction between knowledge and wisdom. Therefore considering the objects of nature as persons and acquiring *buddhi* are widely shared beliefs among the Hindu peasantry which compels us to consider a certain degree of continuity of thought pattern between the little traditions of the tribes and peasant communities. Let me reiterate that the tribes have been part of the economic, social, political and ideological processes of the region they inhabit. But there is a caveat. Underlying the larger processes is the **power dynamics**: those who rule and those who are ruled. The fundamentals of the relationship between the two, are appropriation of the natural resources required by the ruling

class and drawing on the labor and skills of the ruled. Though the ruling class may heavily draw on the intellectual resources of the subjugated population it never acknowledges them and such knowledge does not remain in that raw form, it is perpetually systematized and refined, and may feed back to the subjugated classes in the new form who may adopt them in their own medium, dialect and framework in general. In other words, the interaction between the great traditions of a civilization and little traditions of the general masses never **takes place in power vacuum**. Need for labor and resources is ever enlarging and therefore the net for appropriation for tangible and intangible resources also keeps on ever widening. Those who are brought into the net have their natural growth arrested which tend to be rationalized in social, political, economic and ideological terms.

Tribes embedded in larger society

Thus there is enough evidence to indicate that the tribes are embedded in the social, cultural, philosophical and linguistic environment of the region in which they exist, besides being a part of the regional economic and political organization. They cannot be considered as exclusive population. They cannot be adequately understood, without referring to the environment in which they exist particularly, the political equation.

Let me elaborate this point. India has a long history and there have been many centers of excellence, specialization and seats of power at all India, regional and local levels. These centers and their hinterlands were tied together in complex networks. Irrespective of the fact that whether the networks were strong and clearly identified or weak and vague, they made it possible for the flow of ideas and values back and forth. Numerous deities that are found in the Hindu religion have either links or origin among the tribes and some have been adopted in the Hindu mythology (see P.R.G.Mathur's study of Sabarimala unpublished dissertation). Both folk and literary knowledge indicate that people have some broad, though perhaps vague, ideas about geography, mountains, hills, rivers, oceans, forests and deserts and they have localized versions of the Hindu mythology and histories (see Thapar 2013: 701). Mahabharata and other Indian texts make many references to forests and to the people inhabiting them. In Mahabharata, there are references to the exiled Pandavas seeking cooperation from forest dwellers, for their subsistence. And sometimes they had confrontation with them (see Karve 1974). In Hindu mythology the abodes of Gods and Goddesses are often located on the top of the hills, forests or in rivers and oceans, and are considered sacred. Some animals have been depicted as incarnation of gods and also as their *Vahanas* (vehicles). Such animals are considered sacred and addressed as persons. Hanuman, one of the most powerful gods in the Hindu pantheon is represented as monkey. He along with an army of monkeys and bears helped Lord Ram to locate his wife and win a big battle against Ravana, the king of Lanka. It was not only the monkeys and bears but

there were other animals too involved with Rama in search of his wife, Sita and also in his battle with Ravana. Vocabularies of ancient tradition of classical dance in India are full of *mudras* (poses) and movements depicting animals, suggesting the choreographers had a close association with the life in the forest.

Complex political history

The long political history of India entailed drawing and redrawing of political boundaries, which of course necessitated movements of troops through forests, deserts, hills and rivers. Such movements must have led to interactions with local population for direction, guidance, support, food, water and other supplies, including establishing political domination in frontier zones (see Rajan 1984 for specific illustration of power dynamics in border regions inhabited by the forest dwelling population of the Soliga). Such political domination, irrespective of the period it lasted or its strength, did not greatly disturb the structure of the traditional Indian society and its inter-relationships.

Autonomy within

The traditional Indian society is highly structured in terms of *Varna* and *Jati*. *Varna* is a broad hierarchical model; each of the four Varna has numerous *jatis* in any given region. A *jati* of one region may not be known outside its region but people do try to place them in the *Varna* order. The *jati* system is a highly decentralized organization, which in fact is greatly responsible for its longevity. Writing about *jati*, Ramanujam says, 'Each *jati* or class defines a context, a structure of relevance, a rule of permissible combinations, a frame of reference, a meta-communication of what is and can be done' (1989: 53). In traditional India, mode of production was mostly localized and catered to a region. A village community in India, the backbone of India's social structure was composed of a number of *jatis*. Each *jati* had its own hereditary occupation, culture and dialect. Each *jati* was enjoying autonomy of a sort and regulated its internal affairs, yet there was a great deal of social and economic interdependence between *jatis* while maintaining their hierarchical relationship which has been variously described as *jajmani* system. The goods and services were distributed through *jajmani* relationships, weekly markets, periodical fairs, pilgrimage and forest dwelling populations whom Fox had described like any professional *jati* in the Hindu caste structure (Fox 1969: 139-160). What was not available through these established sources was supplied by peripatetics who were always looking for gaps in the supply of goods and services. Gardner writes, 'Hindus are notable for having a society in which both revered texts and actual practices emphasize mutually dependent relations among occupational specialists.....Although horticultural tribes do understandably face agricultural competitors for their land, foragers have a unique and highly valued occupation with the region. Apart from occasional forays into the forest by

individuals such as Ayurvedic doctors, they have been the prime collectors of medicinal plants, wild honey and a variety of other precious forest products. No one seeks to compete with them. Just as Hindu landowners and occupational specialists can supply each one another with goods and services century after century, without there being significant cultural convergence among them to take part in long term exchanges with specialists from ancient civilization without great erosion over time of their earlier way of life....Until private and government development work began near mid-twentieth century, there were no serious incentives for others to drive them out of the forest or convert them into some other kind of specialists. For centuries, perhaps millennia, they have been valuable to the larger system for precisely what they traditionally did in the forest hills' (2013: 510-11). What Gardner has written is extremely important in understanding the foraging society in relation to the larger Hindu society. His observations raise one very important question is as how to explain that in spite of economic, social and cultural relations **for centuries appreciable convergence did not take place**. The other aspect which is equally important which has not been raised is the power equation, the relationship between dominant and dominated.

Coercive cooperation

While a great deal has been written about the cooperation within the Indian *jajmani* system, and the autonomy enjoyed by individual *jatis*, what has not been adequately discussed is the aspect of coercion in it, politics of domination, and how the ideology of hierarchy strongly supported by the concept of purity and pollution, had a strangle hold in making the system which was extremely unjust, cruel and suffocating for the *jatis* lower in the order (see Rajalakshmi Misra's paper on maintenance of hierarchy based on the notion of purity and pollution among the tribes in a region in southern India 1972: 135-48, indicating *jati*-like structure among the tribes in a primarily forest region). However, looked from this angle the *jatis* even when most suppressed, had no choice except to endure, and in the process internalized their inferior position, and suffered the system. For example, years of subjugation of the Paniya almost as slaves by the local landlords made them feel that they were 'no good', 'lazy', etc., and were incapable of managing their own farms, though the truth was that the landowners thrived on their hard labor (Misra and Misra 1988: 52-70). Hockings has documented systematic massacre and suppression of the Kurumbas in the Nilgiris (Hockings 2013: 232-34). The suppressed classes had no escape route other than to migrate to a new location and for the foragers, they often withdrew themselves deep inside the forest for at least a limited period of time to refresh themselves and get over the stress caused by the power dynamics.

In pre-industrialized India, forests were a huge store-house of resources, some of which like fire-wood, timber, bamboo, medicinal plants, herbs, spices,

root vegetables, fruits and a variety of other minor forest produce were in great demand by the larger society some of which were used in cottage industry as well and also in trade within the country and also outside. A great part of traditional Indian medical practice was dependent on medicinal plants extracted from the forest. Animals were in great demand for their flesh, skin, fur and bones etc. Of these animals, elephants were of special importance. All those who sought to display their exalted sense of courage, vigor and power always considered hunting of wild animals a sport. A diverse group of people were engaged in pursuit of the game: they laid the plan and were strategically posted to shout, drum and chase the harassed animal. Of course their role and the risk to which they were exposed in the operation was least recognized. And who else could these people be?

It is a truism in the world over that the most labor intensive, risky, dirty work is done by those who are considered weak and low in hierarchy. For the work they do is neither rewarded adequately or the importance of the work they do is recognized. Further, they are not easily allowed to get out of it.

Thus it was in the interest of the larger society that the forest dwelling population remains in the forest. Their knowledge about the forest and its resources, skill in climbing tree, extracting forest goods, and ability to hunt, guide in the forest and capture and train elephants were fully utilized. Forests were also used as natural frontier and the forest dwellers as allies. For the larger Hindu society, the forest and forest dwellers were held in awe, their austerity, simplicity and romance were admired. But they themselves would not like to inhabit the forest which was associated with all kinds of hazards and dangers. That was, however recommended for truth seekers and students who went for *Gurukulas* for learning. It was also a place for those who were banished by the society. On their own forest dwelling population subsisted on collection of tubers, fruits and honey, trapping small animals and birds, fishing and hunting. They consumed a part of which they foraged, hunted and the rest was bartered for other goods they needed such as grains, clothes, spices, vessels and iron tools. Some also cultivated on small, cleared plots inside the forest.

This is a general picture, but what is needed in order to understand the dynamics of the situation is to systematically trace the specific relationship between the forest and hill dwellers and the surrounding peasants and the penetration of the state power and its economic interest through history. The roles of the towns located at the edges of the forest have to be worked out and so also of penetration of trade and commerce through regular or weekly markets, peripatetics and a variety of other traders.

Era of huge contradiction

Situation of tribes in India in post colonial era not only indicate huge contradiction but has also created a serious dilemma for the field based students

of tribes. While in the colonial period the tribes were pulled into state system, in the process were dispossessed of all their traditional rights on commons and forest resources which were certainly not set right in post colonial phase. For the forest dwellers the forest not only provided them with essential resources but also joy and romance. But when the British rule was established they imposed a variety of restrictions on them. They were forbidden to practice their traditional method of cultivation and were warned not to wander in the forest. If they were a Forest Villager they became liable at any moment to be called to work for Forest Department. If they lived elsewhere they were forced to obtain licenses for almost every kind of forest produce. At every turn the Forest laws tormented their lives. This destroyed their self confidence and self respect. Elwin counted that in the year 1933-34 there were 27000 forest offences registered against the forest dwellers in Central Provinces and Berar which of course did not include the so called offences which were not registered (since then such numbers must have gone up by many times). In order to meet those charges the tribesmen had to make numerous journeys to the distant courts and had to deal with discourteous lawyers, their touts and petition writers. A petition writer confided to Elwin with a certain degree of triumph that when a tribesman came to him to write a petition besides his authorized charges, he asked his client whether the petition was to be written by ordinary pen or fountain pen which meant special charges. Besides all these there were a variety of self appointed reformers who squeezed the innocent tribesmen bone dry. That was the situation almost a century ago, what is most distressing that the situation of tribes have not radically changed (see for instance the recent book 'Wood Smoke and Leaf Cups' by Madhu Ramnath, brought out by Harper Litmus, 2015. The book is a simple narrative of the author's stay among the Durwa, a tribe in central Indian region where Elwin worked in 1930). In the post colonial phase the big change has been that the development agenda has been thrown in a big way and also numerous legislation safeguarding the interest of the tribesmen, some of which are certainly progressive and forward looking have been passed but their implementation has left much to be desired. But the irony is that every step of development peripheralizes them. There is a complex relationship between development and peripheralization. Simplifying this complex relationship will certainly is risky and may invite ridicule. In spite of this danger, I may state yes, some individuals do begin to rise on the ladder but the ladder itself begins to rise, the community is left behind and such individuals lose contact with the community- perfect example of alienation. The development environment is so shrill and compulsive that there are no options. The members of the community get confused and lose control over their lives and resources. The situation is best illustrated by the language situation. Each one of the tribes has a speech variety of their own but there is no scope for those speech varieties in the modern development agenda though in all learned gatherings it is conceded that the best way to educate is through one's own mother tongue. But in practice it is just the opposite of it. It is also

pretty well known that it takes thousands of years to develop a language. Every language is a part of the cultural heritage of the community but also for the entire humanity. Death of a language is the loss of that heritage. Coming to more material side of the development the fact is it is they, tribes, who are displaced in the name of conservation or development project which cause them much distress. It is ironic that those who observed restraint and lead a simple life and preserved the environment for thousands of years are themselves endangered categories. Their world view representing the values of conviviality, reciprocity, sharing, caring, egalitarianism and sensitivity to nature lie shattered. Their distresses is compounded owing to burgeoning growth of population, urbanization, industrialization, deforestation in a massive scale and add to that misplaced priorities. More specifically it is the fragmented view of life. Whatever appreciation is of exotic way of life it is romantic and ornamental

The dilemma for the field oriented students of tribal studies is owing to the wearing of false masks of duality. For some historical reasons it was emphasized that the anthropologist in order to get inside perspective should wear a mask of participant observation and then he was advised to throw this mask in order to communicate with fellow academician. Srinivas has called this as 'twice born' phenomenon for the field anthropologists. I need not labor here to demonstrate how false it is. The issue is that the genuine practitioners of this mode of data collection have begun to realize its false nature but the studied people themselves have not only started seeing through the game particularly when they are perpetually pushed against the wall but also they are now posing difficult questions to the field anthropologists. It is open now that in some of the regions the tribes are fighting a grim battle and all the odds are against them. In such a situation you cannot be showing interest in their family, marriage systems etc. The duality has to go and a genuine grass root level participatory anthropology has to grow.

Notes

1. The author of the classic *The Toda*, W.H.R.Rivers the founder of the genealogical method came to the Nilgiris to authenticate the stages of cultural evolution. Swanton writes, 'The Todas would present a most remarkable object lesson in evolution, if as Mr. Rivers suggests, they should, under European influence, now evolve from polyandry through group marriage into monogamy'(1907:198).
2. The French philosopher, Montesquieu said of the Negroes, 'One cannot well imagine that God who is so wise should have put a soul, moreover an immortal soul, into an entirely black body. It is impossible to think that these people are human beings' (quoted by Radhakrishnan 1948:253)

3. What a cruel joke that the Toda who have been called as one of the primitive tribes have been studied by scores of scholars from across the world over generations and there are at least 67 academic papers which includes 12 major tomes besides numerous other popular writings in news papers and magazines (see Foreword of Anthony Walker (2015) and still there is scope to write about them. There must be some extraordinary definition of primitiveness.

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