Felix Padel

Ecocritical Perspectives on Adivasi Destiny. Past Present and Ancient Future?

Abstract: Adivasi culture is the essence of hidden India. Tribal people represent India's most ancient cultures, and preserve the strongest set of nature-respecting values, which can be summarised as 'deep ecology' – an economy based on ecological principles, of living lightly on the land and minimising private property, with strong emphasis on co-operation and labour exchange. British rule brought huge iniquities, and Adivasis rebelled again and again against the scarlet or khaki uniforms and unjust laws that alienated the forest from those who had always lived in and around it. Independent India has continued the same power structures in a system of 'internal colonialism', enforcing a vast scale of dispossession. Adivasis' present condition is then extremely harsh, as patterns of exploitation and outsider-domination have escalated to extreme levels of dispossession and marginalisation. Mining projects and metal factories are invading tribal lands, big dams are drowning them, and a hideous civil war in the areas of eastern and central India is enlisting Tribal people on both sides. Adivasi culture offers a vision of true, long-term sustainability and survival, but as communities are displaced and split between left and right, the human suffering escalates, and the way ahead is opaque. What will be the future destiny of Adivasis?

Keywords: *deep ecology, civil war, past, future, development*

Adivasi culture is the essence of hidden India, or 'the other India'. The ancient tribal or indigenous cultures, attuned over countless generations to a softly moulded, sensitively managed landscape, represent a vast continuity with ancient India. But rather than seeing them as 'the past', what if they also represent India's future? In terms of living sustainably on the land, without a doubt, they are ahead of the game.

In British times, 'the little Gond with his axe' is at the centre of Kipling's *Jungle Stories* – a hidden centre, barely visible. Even today, Adivasi culture barely figures in the consciousness of India's urban middle classes, or for tens of thousands of tourists who visit India, or even for most indigenous people in New Zealand or throughout the continent of America, who rarely hear about India's Adivasis and their urgent issues. Beyond the stereotyped language of journalism or academia, tribal India, with its complex linguistic, ritual, political and ecological systems of knowledge and practices, is still there, hidden from general awareness by a leafy canopy of remoteness and colonial-era prejudice. But also by the harsh modern realities of extreme poverty, injustice, and a system of endemic exploitation.

Part of the problem is that we do not hear Adivasi voices. It is not that Adivasis do not speak. Often they are super-articulate. But who listens? Commercial media has in-built forms of hierarchy and censorship. To hear Adivasis speak openly and

confidently demands a kind of equality and freedom from fear that is too little in evidence. As Russell Means, a leader of the American Indian Movement of indigenous people in the USA, says: "My culture, the Lakota culture, has an oral tradition, so ordinarily I reject writing. It is one of the white world's ways of destroying the cultures of non-European peoples, the imposing of an abstraction over the spoken relationship of a people".[1]

Nevertheless, there are voices out there, in written form also, that one can listen to. Gladson Dungdung is an Adivasi activist from Jharkhand. His book *Whose Country Is It anyway?*[2] brings harsh truths for anyone willing to listen to 'the other India'. In his opening words, he draws attention to a recent Supreme Court Judgement that emphasizes Adivasis' position as India's indigenous people. What does this mean in India, whose population has an unprovable history of layers upon layers of indigeneity and long-past invasions? Above all, it is through a rootedness to the earth and links to the land. In Odisha, for example, it is easily observable that Adivasi languages have names for every feature of the landscape and species of plant or animal life in a way that Odia[3] does not. This rootedness of culture and identity to the land is what makes Adivasi people and communities so hard-hit when they get dispossessed, which in turn is why so many Adivasi movements are resisting further displacement so hard right now.

'Adivasi' means 'First Dwelling', with similar connotations to 'Indigenous' or 'Aboriginal'. The word 'Adivasi' only came into use in the 1930s through political leader Jaipal Singh in what is now Jharkhand.[4] The official term is 'Scheduled Tribe' (ST). One difficulty occurs because many tribal groups have been classified differently, as 'Other Backwards Castes' (OBCs) for example, such as the *Kurmi* or *Mahato*, who live in parts of Jharkhand, West Bengal and north Odisha, who considered themselves higher in status than other tribes during the 1930s when the classification got fixed – though in the Sunderbans, where numbers of Kurmis were settled during British times, they retain ST status!

The British brought huge numbers of central Indian tribal people to Northeast India, and settled them there to work in tea plantations. This has brought them gradually into conflict with tribes indigenous to Assam, and this conflict has escalated painfully in recent years, and is one reason why the term 'Adivasi' is not in general use in the northeast – or is even applied to these central Indian-origin tribal people who did not originate in Assam.

Even more than this, Adivasi society is now too often divided in three ways between an elite to some extent educated out of their traditions and complicit in the corporate culture that is staging takeovers of Adivasi lands, a Marxist or Maoist section identified with resistance against the status quo, and a more or less traditional section still trying to hold onto their lands.

British rule brought huge iniquities, and Adivasis rebelled again and again against the scarlet or khaki uniforms and unjust laws, that alienated the forest from those who have always lived in and around it. Independent India has continued the

[1] Russell Means, an iconic leader of the American Indian Movement, gave this speech in 1980, partially transcribed in Russell Means, "On a New Consciousness of the American Indian Movement", *Lokayan Buletin*, 7 (August 1982), and quoted in Felix Padel, *Sacrificing People: Invasions of a Tribal Landscape* (Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2010) 26, 29.

[2] Gladson Dungdung, *Whose Country Is It Anyway? Untold Stories of the Indigenous Peoples of India (*Kolkata: Adivaani, 2013).

[3] The official language of Odisha – both officially renamed in 2010.

[4] The Indian state north of Odisha, formed by bifurcating Bihar in the year 2000.

same power structures in a system of 'internal colonialism', enforcing a vast scale of dispossession. Estimates of the number of tribal people displaced by 'development' in India since Independence suggest that at least 20 million – a quarter of the ST population – have lost their land and/or homes.[5]

So Adivasis' cultures and worldviews face their direst threats right now, from mining projects and metal factories invading their lands, big dams drowning them, and a vicious civil war which enlists them in large numbers on both sides: 'Special Police Officers' in police-trained militias such as the 'Koya Commandos', and Maoists, promising revenge and emancipation, in a war without any end in sight, especially in Chhattisgarh.[6]

'Structural violence' is the phrase summing up the overall repression that Adivasis face, in war as well as peace. One aspect is that thousands are burdened with false court cases as Maoists. Arun Ferreira is a middle class Mumbaiker arrested in eastern Maharashtra in mid-2007 on false charges of complicity in Maoist attacks, and jailed 'under-trial' for over four years. As he shows, in his book *Colours of the Cage: A Prison Memoir*,[7] for every middle class under-trial in India, jailed on false charges, there are hundreds of Adivasis, for whom the madness of charge-sheets and legal mis-procedure represent a net almost impossible to escape from.

What shows the true colours of this war is the vastly increasing employment and deployment of armed police in tribal areas, and the use of massed police and 'false cases', not only against Maoists, but also against communities who are resisting takeover of their lands by mining companies. Part of the huge financial investment coming into local areas for key projects is clearly going into this mass police deployment.

Adivasi culture offers models of true, long-term sustainability and survival of our human species against the odds we have unleashed – models of a co-operative economy based on principles of ecology, and sharing rather than ruthless competition. But as communities are displaced and split between left and right, the human suffering escalates, and the way ahead remains opaque. What will be the future destiny of Adivasis? Can they show the rest of us the way?

The Colonial Power Structure

The main legacy of British rule in India is a power structure that for most tribal people especially was top-down in essence, initiating a mass takeover of tribal land and resources that continues today. One of the primary takeovers was the declaration of forests as state property, setting up a Forest Service in the mid-nineteenth century that has oppressed tribal people ever since. Another was the imposition of various forms of tax. A tax on the making and selling of alcoholic drinks swiftly became a key means of alienating tribal lands. In Orissa for example, the Sundi (distiller) caste took over the selling of *mahua* – the colourless drink

[5] Hari Mohan Mathur, ed., "Creating New Economic Opportunities for Displaced People: Approaches to Income Restoration", *Social Change*, Special Resettlement Issue, 36.1 (March 2006) 87-108; Felix Padel and Samarendra Das, "Orissa's Highland Clearances: The Reality Gap in R & R", *Social Change*, 38.4 (2008), 576-608.

[6] Another State formed in 2000, west of Odisha, formed out of the eastern part of Madhya Pradesh.

[7] Arun Ferreira, *Colours of the Cage: A Prison Memoir* (Delhi: Aleph, 2014).

distilled from flowers of the *mahua* tree. Selling it to Adivasis and getting them into compound debt has forfeited the lands of thousands of families.

Demands for exorbitant revenue by the East India Company from Rajahs[8] started another trend that continues today – the pressure to make land as profitable as possible. Many Rajahs brought in more 'efficient' cultivators, such as the Koltas in Orissa, who dispossessed original inhabitants. The Kalahandi rebellion of Konds in 1884 started out with a massacre of these usurping Koltas.[9] Most tribal rebellions were caused by a combination of these factors. British rule tilted the balance of power in favour of exploiting classes who encroached on Adivasi land and custom in many ways.

In pre-British times, rajahs in Orissa legitimised their power through two means – through the temple, in particular the Jagannath cult centred in Puri, towards their Hindu subjects, and towards tribal subjects by identifying their authority with local cults. Often a stone representing a tribal deity was installed in the Rajah's palace, which in Orissa was always next to a temple of Jagannath. Jagannath himself ('Lord of the Universe') was a composite deity drawn from Shaivite, Vaishnav as well as Buddhist and tribal elements. The main myth of Jagannath states that the deity was 'stolen' by a Hindu king from the Sabara tribe.[10]

In a sense this is the opposite of conversion: Hinduism absorbed tribal deities and religion, and the influence was two way, so that Adivasis understood Jagannath, Durga, Bhairav/Shiva, even Ram and Lakshman as their own, with their own versions of their myths. This fits with the role of tribal people laid down in the *Arthashastra*,[11] which recommends that kings should organise their forest-dwelling subjects into buffer forces, guarding the frontiers of their domain.

This is not to say that this form of rule was always benign, but it made Rajahs dependent on following the custom and goodwill of their tribal subjects. In the kingship rituals of many Rajahs, from Orissa to Rajasthan, a ruler's inauguration was publicly sealed by his tribal subjects. In some areas of central India, Gond kingdoms rose from tribal roots, in a process of Hinduisation, that continues in another way today with the gradual takeover of tribal shrines by Hindu symbols, edifices and priesthoods. To take a typical example, Maa Markoma is the Kond goddess patronised by the Rajah of Bissamcuttack in Orissa, over several centuries. In the time I have known her temple, it transformed from a small shrine in the forest to a massive temple modelled on classical Oriya forms, surrounded by a wall and garden, whose construction has been funded by a succession of politicians.

British rule transformed the legitimation of Rajahs' power. Instead of depending on the goodwill of tribal subjects, a Rajah had to please British rulers, especially by giving them the tribute demanded by the East India Company: default on payments led the British to depose hundreds of rulers, replacing them at will or annexing the kingdoms. A class of moneylenders and revenue collectors gained power in every kingdom, who increased the exploitation and dispossession of tribal subjects. Rajahs' authority was now backed by the force of British arms.[12]

[8] Usually translated as 'Kings'.

[9] Felix Padel, *Sacrificing People: Invasions of a Tribal Landscape*, (Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2010); "Mining Projects and Cultural Genocide: Colonial Roots of Present Conflicts", in Biswamoy Pati, ed., *Adivasis in Colonial India: Survival, Resistance and Negotiation* (Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2011), 316-337.

[10] Hermann Kulke, "Legitimation and Town Planning in the Feudatory States in Central Orissa", in Jan Pieper, ed., *Ritual Space in India: Studies in Architectural Anthropology* (London: Art and archaeology research papers, 17, 1980), 30-40; Padel, *Sacrificing People*, 36, 129.

[11] 'Science of material gain' (the literal meaning of *artha*) or 'Treatise on political economy'. A text attributed to Kautilya, who was Minisiter to Chandragupta, grandfather of Ashoka.

[12] Padel, *Sacrificing*, chapter 5.

One of the first episodes in recorded Indian history shows the less benign side – the initial conquest, long before the British. After Emporer Ashoka waged the Kalinga war around 270 BC, against a people without kings in Orissa who fiercely resisted his authority, he estimated in inscriptions that the war killed 100,000 people, enslaved 150,000, and killed many more through an aftermath of famine and disease. Almost certainly, the Kalinga people were basically the Konds, who call themselves Kuinga, and whose history involved increasing displacement from coastal areas towards Orissa's western interior.[13] This means that Kond culture is well over 2,300 years old. Presumably, Kalinga culture was already strong, with ancient roots, when they put up such a fierce resistance to Ashoka's invading soldiers. Their vanished past includes coastal towns and wooden buildings, as well as a tradition of seafaring towards Southeast Asia. Many surmise that Telugu-speaking fishermen who inhabit much of Orissa's coastline are also remnants of the Kalinga. A parallel is the Tupinamba civilisation who inhabited a large part of Brazil's coastline in large cities, who traded extensively with the Portuguese during the early sixteenth century, and who were exterminated after the first generation of contact, vanishing almost without trace.

[13] Padel and Das, "Orissa's Highland Clearances", 55. See also Romilia Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (Delhi: Oxford U. P., 1961).

Mainstream civilisations in India did not generally annihilate previous cultures to the genocidal extent that became the norm throughout the continent of America. But without any doubt, every Indian tribal culture is the remnant of a civilisation that traces its roots back for centuries before recorded history.

British rule set in motion a dispossession of these cultures, not only from their land and resources, but from their own identity and traditions. After initially resisting the influence of missionaries as an interference with the business interests of the East India Company, British rule in tribal areas gradually delegated key roles in the process of 'civilising the savage tribes' to Christian missionaries. Tribal areas were essentially parcelled out between many different Protestant and Roman Catholic missionary societies, who took on the task of giving them 'education' and the benefits of modern medicine. Medical and educational establishments were often geared towards the aim of conversion. As a result, large sections of many tribal peoples became Christian from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.[14]

[14] See Padel, *Sacrificing*, chapter 6.

The proportion of converts was particularly large in Northeast India, since many of these communities, unlike those of central India, felt little affinity with Hindusim. In what is now Jharkhand, central Orissa, and many other areas, conversion to Christianity often split communities, and led to a strong initial rejection of certain aspects of their tradition. For example, missionaries encouraged many communities to cut down their sacred groves. In more recent times, Christian Adivasis have tended to recreate a synthesis, highlighting the ecological values embedded in pre-Christian traditions. Even now though, conversion to Christianity often demands, for example, a rejection of huge traditional knowledge systems of herbal medicine, since Christianity has become identified with modern medicine and hospitals. Which is strange, since the role of Jesus, as an outstanding

faith healer highlighted in the Bible, has more in common with shamanic healing techniques than with hospital medical practice.

Colonial anthropology also had a strong impact on how tribal cultures are classified and perceived – above all as 'primitive' in every domain. Though many colonial administrators and missionaries took a strong positive interest in tribal cultures, the way they reduced this 'knowledge' to paper, *objectified* the cultures, compounding the political subjugation with an intellectual subjugation.[15]

The missionary and anthropologist roles reinforced state interests in defining tribal people as 'primitive', 'backward', 'pre-literate' and 'in need of development', paving the way for an escalating dispossession after Independence, in the name of 'development', geared towards mass takeovers of the land, forests, mountains, water sources and minerals in and under tribal territories.

Internal Colonialism, Investment-Induced Displacement

In most parts of India, the takeover started slowly. But Telengana[16] witnessed large-scale violence right after Independence, when communists backed tribal and other peasant communities taking back alienated lands in an estimated 3,000 villages, which were soon being violently repossessed by landlords, backed by the Indian army. In Nagaland, repression of tribal rebels reluctant to recognise Indian hegemony became extremely violent from 1955. Sociologist A.R. Desai, in pioneering work too little highlighted, recorded the extremely violent repression used against insurgents in Northeast India from the 1950s on.[17]

Elsewhere, the first mega-dams involved mass displacement of tribal communities from the 1950s-60s on. Sometimes tribal communities strongly resisted being displaced by dams, and this resistance was violently suppressed. Even memory of many anti-dam movements has tended to be repressed, but it was certainly there, for example in Orissa against the Hirakud dam in the 1950s-60s, and against the Rengali and Upper Indravati dams in subsequent decades, up to vicious repression of the Lower Suktel dam since 2010.[18] The pattern in almost every dam-displacement is the same: extravagant promises backed by force, followed by the betrayal of almost every promise given. The documentary *DAM-aged*[19] presents revealing interviews with Adivasi villagers whose lands were drowned, and whose promises for good land and water, electricity, education, medicine etc have been betrayed *in toto*. A new generation of mega-dams in Northeast India threatens to displace large parts of surviving intact communities such as the *Idu Mishmi* and *Adi* tribes, and is causing huge tension within Arunachal Pradesh and other areas that have been free from insurgency. An Agartala Declaration of 15th February 2013 and a Dimapur declaration on 18th May 2013 both asserted the rights of indigenous northeasterners to their land and resources.[20] This follows a long history of dispossession by mega-dams even in the Northeast.

[15] Padel, *Sacrificing*, chapter eight is a critique of colonial anthropology and the continuation of a colonial style of anthropology post Independence; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed, 2012) gives a more general critique of anthropological objectification from the Maori experience in New Zealand.

[16] The Telengana rebellion, which started just before Independence, is dated to 1946-51. Andhra Pradesh was bifurcated in 2014 to create a new State called Telengana.

[17] See in particular Akshai Ramanlal Desai, ed., *Violation of Democratic Rights in India* (London: Sangam Books, and Delhi: Popular Prakashan, 1986) and *Repression and Resistance: Violation of Democratic Rights of the Working Class, Rural Poor, Adivasis and Dalits* (Bombay: South Asia Books, 1990), 309-311.

[18] Padel and Das, "Orissa's Highland Clearances", 72-100. On recent repression against protesters threatened with displacement by the Lower Suktel dam, Subrat Kumar Sahu "Dams and the Doomed... Min(e)d Games of the State", *Sanhati*, 29 April, 2013 at http://sanhati.com/excerpted/6661/.

[19] *DAM-aged* (2010). Documentary by Subrat Kumar Sahu in Odia and Kuwi with English subtitles and commentary.

[20] The Agartala Declaration Of Indigenous Peoples' Consultation On Dams And Natural Resources Protection In India's North East, is available at http://indigenouspeoplesissues.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17252: india-agartala-declaration-of-indigenous-peoples-consultation-on-dams-and-natural-resources-protection-in-india-s-north-east&catid=33:central-asia-indigenous-peoples&Itemid=66. See also on the Dimapur Declaration: Richard Kamei. "Hydro Power Projects and Northeast India: Ecology and Equity at Stake", *Kafila,* 30 June 2013, at http://kafila.org/2013/06/30/hydro-power-projects-and-northeast-india-ecology-and-equity-at-stake/ Kamei, Richard 2013. "Hydro Power Projects and Northeast India: Ecology and Equity at Stake", *Kafila* 30 June, at http://kafila.org/2013/06/30/hydro-power-projects-and-northeast-india-ecology-and-equity-at-stake/. On northeastern dams generally, see Felix Padel, Ajay Dandekar and Jeemol Unni, *Ecology Economy: Quest for a Socially Informed Connection* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2013), 59-61.

For example, the Dimbur dam in Tripura displaced an estimated 20,000 members of the Borok tribe in the early 1970s.

If dams have been the biggest displacer of Adivasis, mining and metal projects come a close second, and here the corporate interests in play are extremely clear. In fact, the two are connected, since metal factories consume large amounts of the water and hydro-power supplied by mega-dams. Among the worst offenders is a company that has paid a lot to maintain a high reputation – Tata Steel. The Gua massacre of Ho Adivasis 20 km south of Noamundi, in the south of what is now Jharkand is among the worst single massacre of Adivasis in post-Independence India, which took place over several days from 7th September 1980, against Adivasis protesting against land seizures for a new steel plant, which included the killing by police of wounded Adivasis in a hospital. The Kalinganagar massacre on 2nd January 2006 involved police firing against Adivasi protestors in Jajpur district of Orissa, who objected to land being taken for a vast new steel factory on their land, that has since been built; with subsequent firings in 2010. Over a dozen Adivasis died at Kalinganagar, and probably many more than this at Gua.

The steel and coal industries have caused mass-scale Adivasi displacement, and so has the aluminium industry. Nalco (National aluminium company, set up in Joint Venture with the French giant Pechiney from 1980) started the displacement process at Damanjodi in Koraput district of Orissa from 1980. Though Nalco's resettlement of displaced Adivasis is often claimed as exemplary, investigations on the ground prove otherwise. Poverty indicators in Koraput are among the worst in India despite – or because of – 30 years of aluminium-oriented 'development'.[21] Among the side effects are at least 500 sex workers in Damanjodi,[22] and a devastated, desiccated landscape where once there was forest.

Niyamgiri is a mountain range a bit over 100 kms to the northeast, inhabited by the Dongria Konds. This is where the London-based company Vedanta has been trying to mine bauxite, building its Lanjigarh refinery just below the peak it wanted to mine, without first obtaining permission to mine. As a result, its factory is running at a loss, bringing bauxite from distant areas. A drawn-out movement of local people with a broad range of support from civil society has ensured that Niyamgiri remains intact. After a complex history, a Supreme Court order in April 2013 asked for the villages nearest the bauxite deposit to decide whether they wanted mining-based 'development' or not. Dalits joined Dongria in voting unanimously 'no' to mining, and 'no' also to getting parcels of forest land allotted to each family under the Forest Rights Act, insisting that the mountain and its forests belong to them all: a rejection of private property in favour of the tradition of communal property characteristic of tribal societies.

To many Odias, the minerals in Odisha's mountains are lying 'unutilised', with potential to generate great wealth in one of India's poorest states. To anyone who understands the way the mining industry works, this is a con: profits never give real benefit to local communities; mining and metal production generate wealth for a

[21] Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), *Rich Lands, Poor People: Is Sustainable Mining Possible?* (Delhi: CSE, 2008).

[22] Kevin Perry, "Secrets and Lies: Tackling HIV among sex workers in India", *The Guardian,* 7 December 2010, at http://kevinegperry.com/2010/12/07/secrets-and-lies-tackling-hiv-among-sex-workers-in-india/.

tiny, distant elite, at the cost of devastated communities and ecosystems. As Dongria leader, Lado Sikoka put this, "People think there's crores of rupees at the top of our mountain. It's not money up there, it's our *Maa-Baap* (Mother-Father) and we'll defend her!"[23]

[23] Sikaka speaking at the Belamba Public Hearing, Lanjigarh on 28 April 2009, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipHmVee_uXw

Yet the cost is high. Vedanta is still exerting great pressures to try and obtain mining rights to Niyamgiri or one of the nearby mountains such as those near Karlapat or Kashipur, which would be equally destructive for local communities and forest ecologies. Tribal people understand mountains as sources of life. In scientific terms, the bauxite capping these mountains acts as a sponge, absorbing monsoon rain and releasing it slowly through perennial streams, which start to dry up in summer as soon as the deposit starts to be mined. The first geologists who surveyed these mountains noted the exceptional fertility around them due to their abundant perennial water sources, calling their base rock Khondalite after those fine hill men, the Khonds who live all around them. A reciprocal relationship: the Odia writer Gopinath Mohanty, recorded a Census official, asking Konds their religion got the unexpected answer 'Mountains'. And in the words of a Dongria woman, speaking out against mining, "We need the mountain and the mountain needs us".[24]

[24] Padel and Das, "Orissa's Highland Clearances", 579, 597.

Following Maoists' kidnap of two Italian tourists in 2012, and demand to ban 'tribal tours', tourists no longer visit Dongria villages. In their place, the CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) visit, on the pretext of searching for Maoists, with frequent acts of intimidation and disrespect, culminating in the arrest of Dongria leader Haribandhu Kadraka on blatantly false charges of Maoist activity.

Though both sides project the Maoist conflict as ideological, basically it is a war over resources. Maoists may be correct that it is class war, but their attacks on tribal elites led to the formation of Salwa Judum,[25] and their attacks on police lead to violent retaliation on surrounding villages, which escalates the conflict. Both sides are prepared to allow a horrendous sacrifice of human life to further their aims, and Maoists, while they name themselves after Mao, will never give a proper critique of the mining industry, if only because Mao's 'Great Leap Forward' in 1958-60, which caused one of the world's worst famines, displaced millions of cultivators from the land in order to raise the national steel output – precisely what India is doing now.

[25] 'Purification hunt' seems to be the best translation of this Gondi expression. Another version often found is 'peace march', which is highly inappropriate.

Hundreds of Adivasi communities are now divided between those joining the Maoist cadres, and those enrolling as SPOs (Special Police Officers – tens of thousands of Adivasis enlisted for fighting the Maoists), making this a classic civil war, and arguably the worst war there has ever been in India, since it enlists Adivasis on both sides, and displaces some of the country's most ancient communities.

The dispossession taking place in India's mining areas is technically *investment-induced displacement*. The usual phrase is 'development-induced displacement', but for most tribal people displaced, the projects dispossessing them do not represent

real development at all, but its polar opposite – an undermining of centuries of development, forming cultures that base their economy on principles of ecology. The impact of mining and displacement is the dividing of communities and the undermining of highly developed systems of balance between people and nature. Mineral-oriented investment into tribal areas is basically promoting a resource war, by funding a massive increase in employment of armed police there, at the same time as boosting the arms industry.

Ancient Futures?

Tribal cultures are adapted to long-term survival. They offer examples that have sustained over centuries of how to draw sustenance from nature without destroying it, based on restraint – not taking too much, or before first fruit ceremonies are performed: a completely different model from the dominant relationship with nature inherited from the West, based on dominating nature and exploiting it to the maximum for short-term gain, at the same time romanticising it into pretty paintings, photos, or gardens where foreign species and regimented straight lines predominate.

Ancient Futures is the title of Helena Norberg-Hodge's seminal work on Ladakh,[26] that analyses how Buddhist Ladakhi traditions evolved a careful balance with fragile Himalayan ecosystems that modern life is undermining fast. The same analysis applies in India's tribal areas, in Central India, the Northeast, and elsewhere. India's remaining forests and water sources are under threat from a rapidly expanding economic system where short term profit is the main principle guiding politics as well as industry. When producing one tonne of steel consumes over 40 tonnes of water, and one tonne of aluminium consumes over 1,000 tonnes of water, and India's groundwater and other water sources are rapidly depleting, what sense does economic growth make if it is based on rapid extraction of the country's remaining minerals and water sources? What future will be left for coming generations, in 1,000, 100 or even 20 years?

'Adivasi Economics' evokes economic systems not based on money, but on ecological principles of restraint and respect towards nature, prioritising sharing over competition.[27] It is a paradox that some of India's tribal people perceived as 'most primitive' have shown the greatest skills in survival. None of the Andaman islanders were killed in the 2004 tsunami: seeing the sea recede, they retreated to high ground, understanding instinctively or from tradition what was coming. It is to the immense credit of the Indian Government tat the Jarawa Reserve for the largest remaining Andamans tribe, who survived the genocide started during British rule; has been set aside, that tourism in most of the Nicobar Islands has been forbidden; and that the Sentinel Islanders are allowed to resist any encroachment to their island with bows and arrows – a unique situation worldwide, and an outstanding example of restraint by a Government.[28]

[26] Helena Norberg-Hodge, *Ancient Futures: Lessons from Ladakh for a Globalizing World* (San Francisco: Sierra Book Club, 2009).

[27] See Padel, Dandekar and Unni, *Ecology Economy*, chapter 2.

[28] On 4th-5th December 2014, the author participated in a National Conference in Port Blair, "Thinking Futures: the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands". See also Madhusree Mukerjee, *The Land of Naked People: Encounters with Stone Age Islanders* (Delhi: Penguin, 2003), and Sita Venkateswar, *Development and Ethnocide: Colonial Practices in the Andaman Islands* (Copenhagen: IWGA, 2004).

Yet the tendency is still to see tribal peoples as 'primitive survivals', especially the most traditional groups until recently classified as 'Primitive Tribal Groups' (PTGs), and now officially 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups' (PVTGs), which includes the Dongria Konds, the Paudi Bhuiyas, threatened by mining in the Khandadhar range of north Orissa, as well as all the Andaman Islanders. This way of seeing came out of anthropology when it was still at a primitive stage. 'Social Darwinism' is an inappropriate, monolithic application of Darwin's theory of evolution, which traced the simultaneous development of hundreds of species along different paths to society, in the mistaken belief that all societies develop through the same, set stages. Societies develop along many different paths. Industrialisation represents one path, but imposed over tribal societies it often leads to an extreme undoing of indigenous development. Also, what was so shocking to fundamentalist believers about Darwin's theory was it showed that humans are closely related to animals – precisely as tribal myths in India, and other countries, emphasize that other species of animals are our relatives and ancestors, against the idea that other species were created for humans to dominate and exploit.

What is urgently needed is to dismantle the stereotypes underlying the structural violence and injustice being played out towards tribal peoples; to perceive them as highly evolved societies we have much to learn from about the skills needed for long-term survival: sharing natural resources instead of fighting over them, living frugally instead of competing over elaborate status symbols, and living with a lot more joy. One of the areas where tribal cultures are much more highly developed than the mainstream is in elaborate skills of self-entertainment, including dancing, improvised song, and an elaborate culture of romance. Another is in legal systems, recorded for many of India's tribal peoples that aim at reconciling contestants, through fines that pay for feasts of reconciliation, rather than a process that makes one party right, the other wrong, in a system presided over lawyers where outcomes often depend on massive fees, and are open to corruption.

In conclusion, Adivasis, or tribal people, represent India's most ancient cultures, and preserve the strongest set of nature-respecting values, which can be summarised as 'deep ecology' – an economy based on ecological principles, of living lightly on the land and minimising private property, with strong emphasis on sharing and exchange labour. Adivasis' present condition is extremely harsh, as patterns of exploitation and outsider-domination have escalated to extreme levels of dispossession and marginalisation, with a hideous civil war in areas of eastern central India. The militarisation of areas that were extremely peaceful 20-30 years ago is painful to witness, compounded by an education system that attempts to 'assimilate' tribal children into the mainstream, both in terms of hindutva (Hindu nationalism) and an industrialising ideology. We may hope that, before long, this historic injustice will start to be corrected, and mainstream society will begin to

learn from the values and techniques of long-term sustainability that Adivasi culture is based on.