

## **Rapporteur's Report on Socio-Ecological Transitions in the Adivasi Landscapes: A Synthesis Report**

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I

### INTRODUCTION

India is a multi-racial and multi-cultural nation comprising diverse tribes, castes, and religious groups. There are over 730 groups<sup>1</sup> who have been identified officially as Scheduled Tribes (STs) including 75 groups designated as particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs). These scheduled tribes have been referred variously as aborigines, primitives, Adivasi, Janjati, Girijan, Vanavasi, etc. Despite these varied nomenclatures, currently in the sociological and developmental discourse Adivasi is the preferred or more commonly used term for such communities vis-à-vis other terms as it goes with emancipatory connotations (Xaxa, 2020).

The Adivasis, many of whom are indigenous to their habitations, are endogamous groups having distinct traditional and cultural characteristics which make them distinguishable from each other, and from other people living in their vicinity. Their dialects and dietary habits too are distinct from the rest.

According to 2011 census, the Adivasi population of India was 104 million constituting around 8.63 per cent of the total population, of which the majority i.e., 89.97 per cent, resided in rural areas.<sup>2</sup> Though present all over the country, a significant proportion of the Adivasis are concentrated in central, eastern and north-east India.<sup>3</sup> The forest ecology, manifested even in their cultural practices, has shaped the Adivasi life style and livelihoods. Since long, the primary living style of the Adivasis has been one of minimalism aimed at conservation of the ecosystem. Collectivist orientations also have been a common feature among the Adivasis (Desai, 1978). Animism involving worship of spirits and nature has historically characterised the religious system of many of these groups though a significant proportion of them have either adopted or come under the influence of prominent religions in the country.

Adivasi groups display a high level of differentiation in terms of their social and economic conditions. Overall, they are identified to be in different stages of progress or development, and categorised either as primitive or vulnerable groups with hunting and gathering methods or those following shifting cultivation or those with settled agriculture with typical village life or as the landless and marginalised

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who combine migration and labour work, or those living in urban areas having links with organised sectors (*ibid*). The Adivasis, in general, have remained isolated socially, economically, and politically from the larger and dominant society. Over the years, since the colonial period, the Adivasis have been confronted with diverse problems like denial of access to forests and natural resources on which they depended historically, alienation from land, infringement of customary rights, and growing deprivation and poverty (Radhakrishna, 2016). Their isolation and vulnerabilities have made them suffer enormous subjugation, discrimination, and marginalisation (Rao, 2019).

The history of alienation of Adivasis began prominently during the colonial period when the British interfered in their habitations for the purpose of exploiting the rich natural resources. Inclined more towards commercial exploitation, the forest policies of the British Government ignored social and developmental needs of indigenous communities. The loss of access to forests brought increased destitution forcing many groups to rebel against the colonial rule.

While the colonial rule dislocated Adivasis from their habitations, the post-colonial developmental interventions have ended up displacing Adivasi groups even in greater numbers (Government of India, 2004). The process of involuntary displacement in the name of development has been a burning issue which has afflicted prominently the Adivasis of India. The Adivasis accounted for about 40 per cent of all the displaced population in the country, not to mention the huge land alienations faced by them owing to the treachery of the traders and moneylenders who intruded into their territories (Karuppaiyan, 2000). Dams, mining, and growth of industrial and infrastructure complexes in the heart of Adivasi areas have disrupted their traditional ways of life leading to massive displacement and migration. The unrestricted power of the state to acquire private and common lands without commensurate obligations like payment of adequate compensation, proper resettlement and rehabilitation, and recognition of customary rights has pushed Adivasis to the brink leading to loss of identity, community ties, and cultural heritage. The trend seems to have only aggravated in the post-reforms period for the Adivasis (Ota, 2009)

Adivasi agriculture, one of their mainstays, has been largely traditional in nature with diverse crops primarily oriented towards subsistence and food security. However, those farming systems have been subject to demographic and market pressures, resulting in fragmentation of holdings and shift towards crop intensification with use of more modern inputs (Shylendra, 2023). Simultaneously, while there has been curtailment, if not total elimination, of shifting cultivation (*jhuming*) practiced by the Adivasis in varied pockets, settled agriculture has emerged as a prominent livelihood form for those having proper access to farm land and inputs. Yet farming has remained largely low-yielding due to traditional practices, marginal holdings, and reliance on rainfall (Vatta *et al.*, 2017). Though traditional farming practices persist but are transitioning in many Adivasi areas into

external input orientated specialized systems. While such transitions may have brought certain benefits in terms of increased yields and output, but have led to overexploitation of natural resources, loss of biodiversity, and increased costs and debt burden disturbing the rhythm of integrated farming systems.

Low and uncertain yields, involuntary displacements, loss of rights over forests combined with absence of alternative livelihood opportunities have induced widespread distress migration among many Adivasi communities (Deshingkar and Farrington, 2009). The Adivasi women, too, have been forced into migratory circuits endemic with exploitative practices. Incidentally, seasonal, and circulatory migration dominate among Adivasis leading to a differentiated impact. Though migration has injected some new vibes by way of urbane names and altered lifestyles, but its distress nature characterised by circulatory form and poor working conditions has only been detrimental to the advancement of Adivasis. For many Adivasis, their livelihood is split between two cultural worlds of rural and urban. Limited education and skill development has posed further impediments to upward mobility reducing many of them to 'nowhere people' (Breman, 2019).

Diverse attempts have been made by the state under the broad rubric of 'mainstreaming the Adivasis' through laws, policies, and programmes to minimize the marginalisation and exclusion. Assessments of these planned interventions by government and non-governmental agencies reveal that they have at best produced mixed results failing to significantly change the situation of the Adivasis. Given some of the peculiarities of the Adivasi communities including having own dialects, it is averred that development initiatives with top-down nature could only exacerbate their socio-economic conditions. Despite wide-ranging initiatives, the Adivasis' situation, even with regard to fundamental indices like poverty and literacy, remains pathetic. For example, as against the country's rural poverty ratio of 25.7 per cent in 2011-12, the poverty ratio for the Adivasis was 45.3 per cent.<sup>4</sup> The literacy rate for Adivasis in India though has improved to 59 per cent in 2011 but is much below the overall level. They also lag behind other social groups on parameters such as child mortality, infant mortality, and anaemia among women (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2013). On a positive side, the sex ratio was 990 as compared to country's sex ratio of 940 in 2011. The loss of forests and other crucial resources has caused widespread Adivasi resentment against the state. Their struggles have led to the state granting few concessions in the form of Panchayat's Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act of 1996, the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006, and a fair policy for land acquisition, relief and rehabilitation (R&R) in 2014 aimed at restoring their rights. While there is a need to understand the working of these progressive steps, available evidence suggest that lack of commitment and inadequate execution have rendered many of them ineffective in protecting the livelihoods and cultural milieu of the Adivasis.

Some of the other interventions include enhanced engagement of Adivasis in development process facilitated through Tribal Sub-plan (TSP), reservations, and modern education. Adivasi areas have also witnessed social reform movements since

long to bring about new consciousness and cultural changes. Religious conversion and attempts for cultural mobility have also been observed among the Adivasis. It is pertinent to mention that administratively besides creation of schedule areas, there are also formation of couple new states based on the demands of Adivasi movements. Scholarly assessments of some of these social and other initiatives suggest that they could bring in only instrumental changes owing to their inadequacies to make any significant difference to the Adivasis' lot (Xaxa 1999).

Thus, Adivasis and their landscapes are faced with multi-pronged crisis of loss of land, destruction of forests, influx of immigrants, loss of identity, and political disempowerment. The multiple alienations have fundamentally affected the way of life, agricultural practices, and food culture. Beginning with the 1990s, the largely callous economic reforms have only added to the woes of Adivasis by worsening their precarious livelihoods. Devastated by many inimical forces, the Adivasis have been resisting oppressions to defend their rights and identities. There is a grave concern that a vast majority of Adivasis could be annihilated as indigenous groups to serve the pillaging capitalist system as its meek reserve army of labour unless the challenges confronting them are addressed (Louis 2007). It is averred that there has arisen a 'Adivasi question' which embodies many of the forgoing grave concerns of Adivasi communities warranting a holistic resolution by integrating ecological, cultural, and economic dimensions germane to Adivasis' emancipation and progress (Munshi 2018). The sub-theme 'Socio-Ecological Transitions in the Adivasi Landscapes' of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference of ISAE aims to deliberate on above issues drawing attention to the vast social and ecological changes unfolding in the Adivasi landscapes affecting the livelihoods, culture, and identity of the Adivasi communities in India. The conference would debate on theoretical and empirical issues pertaining to these socio-ecological transitions in the context of Adivasi advancement. It will facilitate engagement and collaborations with different stakeholders in diverse areas and enable exchange of ideas and experiences in promoting Adivasis' cause through meaningful policies and interventions which combine communitarian considerations such as culture and identity along with other core issues of sustainable resources use and livelihoods. The issues brought out above calls for a critical assessment of the nature of the policy responses in the post-reforms period and the outcomes seen thereof. The present sub-theme hence is highly relevant and needs a thorough debate.

## II

### SYNTHESIS REPORT

Towards possibly answering some the above questions and identify issues for further discussion and research, it would be worthwhile to look at the insights and findings thrown-up by the papers submitted for the conference. In all, thirteen papers were submitted (see Table 1) covering diverse themes pertaining at least to 15 varied tribes and groups spread across 13 states of India. While the concept note had raised a wide range of issues, the papers have studied certain specific issues as per the

TABLE 1: PAPERS SUBMITTED UNDER 'SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL TRANSITIONS IN THE ADIVASI LANDSCAPE'

No.	Articles	Authors	States	Tribes/ Groups
1	Food Insecurity among the Tribal People in Rayagada District of KBK Region: A Policy perspective	Priyabrata Sahoo, Prasanta Kumar Das	Odisha	Kondh
2	Economic Analysis of Farming System of Apatani Farming Community in Arunachal Pradesh-A Way Forward for Sustainability	Lakshmi Dhar Hatai A.K.Tripathi, Anju Choudhury, B.N.Hazarika	Arunachal Pradesh	Apatani
3	Non Timber Forest Products and Their Role in Livelihood Economy of the Tribal People in Bastar Plateau of Chhattisgarh	Ajay Gauraha D.Churpal S.K.Joshi, V.K.Choudhury, R Shrey, P Varma	Chhattisgarh	Baiga, Gond, Kawar
4	Mono-culturing of Cropping in Tribal Area-Threat to Agri-biodiversity: Case study of Tribal Districts of Madhya Pradesh	Poonam Chaturvedi Sunil B Nahatkar	Madhya Pradesh	Gond, Bhil, Baiga, Agariya, Bhariya.
5	Socio-economics and constraint analysis: A micro level evidence of ginger grower in Adivasi landscape of Aizawl district Mizoram, India	H.S.Lalduhsangi Hulas Pathak	Mizoram	Mizos
6	The role of forestry income in reducing poverty and inequality among Baiga tribes in Achanakmar Wildlife sanctuary in Chhattisgarh	Devjit Nandi Debashis Sarkar and Dr. Bitan Mondal	Chhattisgarh	Baiga
7	Access to Farm Land and Incidence of Poverty Among Adivasi Tea Tribes: Evidences from Tea Plantations of Assam	Yograj Sharma Pradyut Guha	Assam	'Adivasi'(Tea-garden Tribes)
8	Livelihood Transformation of Tribals through SHG and Water Hyacinth Product Entrepreneurship: A Case in West Bengal	Dipanwita Chakraborty,	West Bengal	NA
9.	Producer Organisations and Gender-based Tribal Development: Review of Evidence on Performance and Impact of Producer Companies	Sukhpal Singh,	(MP, TN, Kerala, Odisha, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh)	NA
10.	Socio-economic perspective in the Adivasi's land: the case of Chakhao farmers in Manipur	Thongam Kanyalaxmi Devi	Manipur	Meities and others
11.	Displacement and Rehabilitation of Vaitarana Project Affected Tribal Community, Maharashtra	Shivaji Sangle Shivani Sangle	Maharashtra	NA
12.	Changing Dependence of Tribal Community on Forests for Food and Livelihood in Odisha.	Sarba Narayan Mishra, Subhrajyoti Mishra, Surya Sidhant Rath, Pujalipta Behera, Avisweta Nandy.	Odisha	Kondh
13.	A Comparative study of tribal and non-tribal farmers in Koraput district of Odisha.	M. K. Das, P. P. Tripathy, and P. Agarwal.	Odisha	Kandha, Paraja, Gadaba, Bonda etc.

the researchers' interest yet cover fairly a good ground to explicate many crucial aspects. The papers have adopted diverse methods drawing upon literature-based

review, primary survey, secondary data analysis, and case studies in their explorations. The following sections presents a summary of the key findings and insights emerging from the papers under five broad areas. (All the papers under the theme are referred by the serial number as given in Table 1).

### 1. *Socio-Cultural and Demographic Issues*

The papers while clearly highlighting the presence of diverse Adivasi groups in different parts of the country, bring out also some of the unique socio-cultural features and milieu of these groups. Even as many of these groups are indigenous to their areas (2,6), some have for certain historical exigencies have moved to other regions in the process ending up facing crisis of identity and recognition like the 'tea-tribes' of Assam (7). Another prominent feature highlighted is that the many Adivasi groups tend to live in or close to forest areas which fosters a strong bond with nature/forests despite varied attempts to curtail the links by state through various restrictions (6). Forests, remain a major companion for the Adivasis influencing their social, cultural and emotional values natured by Adivasi. While many tribes have adopted settled agriculture, some continue to follow *jhuming* on a limited scale (5). Though individual household-based farming is now widely practiced, yet rights over private or even common land is yet to be fully clarified or confirmed (2,6). The communal land ownership of the past is transitioning towards private holdings in the Adivasi pockets. Conservation practices like sacred grove or integrated resource use continue to be adopted in varied pockets (2,5).

The Adivasis over the years have been exposed to forces of state, market and modernization in several domains of their life, however the extent of change observed in the socio-economic conditions remains relatively limited (6, 13). Demographically, the household size reported by studies based on primary surveys varied from 3.4 to 6.2 across different regions even as in majority cases the size was less than five (2,6,8,10, and 12) reflecting the possible impact of the underlying socio-economic factors at play. Incidentally, as reported by a study, the practice of early marriage among Kondh tribe in Orissa is identified as a factor in the smaller size of households (12). Though there are cases of Adivasi communities having a favorable sex-ratio (1), but some papers (5,6) also suggest apparently adverse scenarios emblematic of possible changing gender relations. Yet some of the studies have clearly brought out prevailing gender disparities be it with regard to nutritional status as observed in Rayagada district of Orissa (1), or about governance of women-based collectives in Adivasi pockets (9). While some interventions like SHGs or FPOs have attracted women Adivasi members, yet policies like Forest Rights Acts (FRA) are found to be patriarchal (6) reinforcing the gender biases.

As regards literacy, the studies show a mixed picture among Adivasi communities with literacy rates ranging from 37 per cent to 92 per cent. However, greater advancement in education remains constrained with average years of

schooling found fairly low for Adivasis (2, 7). Not many studies as such looked at explicitly cultural aspects with only one paper highlighting that Adivasis in the study village in Birbhum district reported belonging to Hindu religion (8).

## 2. *Natural Resources and Adivasis*

Adivasis tend to live in areas rich in natural resources like forests, minerals and rivers. While unsustainable use of natural resources has been a universal concern, the Adivasi dimension brings additionally communitarian and human rights issue. As regards forests, the studies have brought out issues like state of forests, access and rights of Adivasis over forests, role of forests in livelihoods, and governance measures on forests and biodiversity with their implications for Adivasis.

The studies reinforce the well-known symbiotic relations between forests and Adivasis including their customs nurtured for conservation. This is manifested in the increased dependence of Adivasis on forests in many pockets through harvesting of variety of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) besides wild weeds and vegetables (2,6,12). Despite the generally declining state of forests, some of the studies highlight prevalence of dense forests pockets with high bio-diversity including under reserve forests. A major aspect brought out is the presence of a wide variety of NTFPs which are extracted for both consumptive and commercial use by these forest-dependent communities (3,6, 12). Though these studies as such do not bring out the situation about sharing of the major forest products (like timber), they indirectly depict the restraints that have been applied leading to segmented access of the community for timber and non-timber forest products. Only one study highlighted the current situation of forests in the context of conservation measure like JFM and CFM (12). The studies are silent as to whether NTFP availability and harvesting by Adivasis over the years has increased or decreased even as one study made an attempt to capture the changes over two continuous periods (12). The study observed that even though a few NTFPs have disappeared in the second period, the income from NTFP has increased nominally in Kandhamal district.

With forests remaining important for the ecology and livelihoods of forest-dependent communities, varied policy regimes have been put in place to address both the issues. Some of the papers have examined the nature of such policies and their outcomes for the livelihoods of Adivasis. The conservation measures highlighted include the creation of wildlife sanctuary, joint forest management (JFM), community forest management (CFM), and implementation of Forest Rights Act (FRA) (6,12).

The case of Achanakmar Wildlife Sanctuary combined with a Tiger reserve (6) brings out the fact that while environmental protection intended may lead to enhancement of bio-diversity, it can foster conflict with the livelihoods of Adivasis who inhabit the reserve area. Promoting monoculture in the reserve and banning tendu leaf collection create barriers for NTFP gathering, increases distances and even

bribes. FRA which is supposed to ensure collective and individual rights is found implemented poorly along with limited welfare schemes promoted for forest-dependent communities. This is found disempowering the gramsabha with the threat of displacement looming large over the inhabitants. Elsewhere, the working of JFM/CFM along with FRA shows mixed outcomes on forests (12). While management through community participation has improved the state of forests, the dependence of community on forests as a result has increased in two of the three villages of intervention.

Apart from forests, there is a discussion on the use of river water for urban drinking purpose in preference to irrigation for Adivasi farmers (11). This comes out in the context of dam constructed across upper Vaitarana river for a dedicated supply of drinking water to Mumbai denying any access to water by the displaced community. Coupled with poor rehabilitation, the denial of rights had debilitated the livelihoods. With permission granted subsequently for use of water through an improved lift irrigation cooperative, the livelihood has been revitalized for displaced Adivasis.

### 3. *Adivasi Livelihoods*

Livelihoods and changes in them are a major indicator of the underlying transformation process. Some of the papers have tried to depict the livelihood pattern of the Adivasis and changes observed in them including examining in greater detail key livelihood sources like agriculture and NTFP collection. These papers broadly confirm the larger trends observed about the prevailing livelihoods of the Adivasis. The papers clearly indicate that agriculture supplemented by other means remains the major form of livelihood for all the Adivasi groups studied. Even as there is considerable landlessness, a good proportion of Adivasi households possess land and pursue agriculture. While one study (5) reported 91 per cent households pursuing agriculture, another study (2) reported 84 per cent family members engaged in Agriculture. However, in cases where land has emerged as a constraint, a lower proportion tend to depend on agriculture as the primary occupation as reported by studies from Chhattisgarh (43 per cent) and Orissa (39 per cent) (6,12). In the case of Chhattisgarh, including as a secondary occupation, 65 per cent households participate in agriculture. Thus, a very significant proportion of Adivasis continue to don the role and identity of peasants though in varying degrees.

However, given the constraints of agriculture, Adivasi households have tried to diversify into various other sources to supplement their livelihood. Some of these sources include NTFP collection, animal husbandry, farm and non-farm labour, migration, trade and business, and service sector jobs. At least in the case of about four Adivasi groups in Odisha and Chhattisgarh (3,6,12), NTFP collection is the prominent source of livelihood. Baiga, Kondh, Gond and Kavar are the tribes found pursuing NTFP collection prominently. Easier access to forests and constraints of



agriculture are the major reasons that have led to these groups to depend on NTFP collection. NTFPs as a key source of livelihood is also observed in states like West Bengal, T N, Rajasthan (8,9).

Animal husbandry is another livelihood source which is commonly followed by different Adivasi groups. Fish, pigs, poultry, dairy animals and goats are the key types of livestock reared. The holdings however are relatively smaller with the average size varying from 2.5 in Arunachal Pradesh (2) to 7.5 in Orissa (12). The livestock are mainly meant to supplement the agriculture with limited commercialization. Fishery (34 per cent) and livestock (31 per cent) contributed significantly to household income along with agriculture in the case of Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh (2).

Wage labour, farm and non-farm, is another source of livelihood pursued by the Adivasis. Significant wage labor participation is reported across Chhattisgarh, Assam, Maharashtra, Orissa and West Bengal. While in Assam, the migrant 'Adivasi' labourers who came as indentured workers are primarily engaged in tea-garden work (7); in the case of predominantly landless Kondhs in Orissa nearly 47 per cent of the households pursued wage labour as a prominent source employment (12). Agricultural wage contributed up to 22 per cent of income in the case of Baigas of Chhattisgarh (6). Migration of Adivasis seeking wage employment has been reported by four studies (6,8,11 and ,12). Interestingly, while in one case in Orissa an increase in distress migration is observed with 60 per cent households migrating for work due to uncertainty in NTFP collection (12), in another case in Maharashtra there was a decline in the distress migration owing to implementing lift irrigation in Adivasi villages (11).

Non-farm employment by way of trade and business, artisanal service, and jobs in service sector are reported by a few studies. In the case of the predominantly landless Kondhs, non-farm employment was reported by 34.4 per cent households (12); 26 per cent reported non-farm employment in the case of Mizos which included 17 per cent in trade and business and 9 per cent in services (5). Though the extent of formal or organized employment is not explicitly reported, but going by the qualitative evidence much of the non-farm employment appears to be under self-employment and informal sector (8). Traditional non-farm occupations like bamboo and metal crafts and broom-making are reported in a couple of cases (4). Thus, the overall livelihoods of Adivasis remain largely as per the prevailing understanding wherein multiple avenues like agriculture, forestry and other diverse sources are combined in varied degree so as to ensure household food security and livelihood sustenance.

Even as the general conditions of the Adivasis remain precarious, there are diverse challenges confronting their major livelihood sources given the dynamics unfolding owing to demographic changes as well as sector specific issues. In order to understand these source specific challenges, insights about two livelihoods of

Adivasis namely agriculture and NTFP collection as depicted by some of the studies are highlighted in the following sections.

(i) *Adivasi Agriculture:*

Agriculture, a mainstay for many Adivasis has been undergoing crucial changes. Even as land ownership is widely prevalent, small and marginal holdings now predominate with growing fragmentation. While the proportion owing land varied from 28 per cent to 96 per cent across different groups (7,10,13); the average holding size varied from 1.1 hectare to 2.35 hectare (6,3). In a few cases, land possessed also included jhuming and forest land (5,12) though settled agriculture is practiced more commonly.

The type of technology adopted is highly mixed with varied levels of adoption of modern practices. In many pockets, traditional farming continues to predominate with very limited adoption of modern practices or inputs. Traditional agriculture in these belts is characterized by rainfed-based farming, greater use of local/traditional inputs, and mixed cropping (6,13). Cropping intensity varied from 115-161 per cent depending on the agronomical conditions enabling multiple crops/seasons despite limited holdings (3,5). Cropping pattern reveals prevalence of diverse crops in various combinations of cereals, millets, oilseeds, vegetables, fruits, and agro-forestry. Some location specific crops include paddy, millets, vegetables, and oilseeds in Chhattisgarh (6), and ginger, rice, chili, french-beans, banana, mustard and khangu in Mizoram (5). There are also presence of unique variety of crops which have obtained geographical indication (GI) tag like ginger in Mizoram and Chakhao black rice in Manipur (5, 10). Besides multiple crops, there are locations where Adivasis have been following multiple farming systems like the Apatanis in Arunachal Pradesh (2) who combine cereals, fishery, horticulture, livestock, and forestry in varying proportion. With the unique rice-fish mixing the Apatani system utilizes local resources like land, rivers, ponds, forests, livestock, and CRPs in a holistic way. The Apatani agriculture though predominantly traditional yet is considered advanced with optimal and sustainable outcomes (2).

Wherever agriculture is carried out in a relatively reliable way the Adivasi farmers generate some modest returns which ensure their basic food security. For example, the Apatani farmers, generated a net annual return of Rs 76,000 per hectare during 2021-22 though plagued by low and uncertain productivity. Farmers elsewhere struggle to generate adequate output and returns to eke out a decent living (3,6,13). Including Apatani farmers, studies highlight several constraints to increase farm output and returns like low prices, high cost of inputs, and inadequate provision of inputs, credit, and extension. Lack of marketing support is also considered a major constraint (2,5,13). Some of the policy suggestions include provision of appropriate technology, effective inputs supply, marketing, and extension services besides development of infrastructure, and MSP for the crops grown by Adivasis like

millets, ginger, etc. (4,5). Interventions which can make difference to Adivasi farmers, as identified by the studies, include lift irrigation and water user associations in semi-arid belt, and creation of sound farmers' producers' organizations (FPOs). While lift-irrigation cooperatives in the villages of Nasik have helped revitalize agriculture by improving agricultural intensification and diversification (11), the FPOs in several Adivasi pockets have helped ease input or market constraints for those involved in crop production, animal husbandry and NTFP collection (9).

No doubt augmenting limited returns of Adivasi agriculture may need appropriate technologies, concerns are raised over the growing influence of HYV-based agriculture in Adivasi regions and its implications for the crop diversity (4). The Adivasi regions are considered repositories of traditional germplasms which have not been given proper valuation. As agriculture plays a key role in the food security of Adivasis, any aggressive introduction of HYV-based technology could promote monocropping practices threatening seriously the bio-diversity. The study based on cropping pattern changes in the Adivasi dominated districts in the last two decades (4), revealed that traditional crops like millets are being eschewed in favor of rice, wheat and other crops owing to proactive policy support to modern agriculture with subsidies and MSP. Need for sustainable agriculture is emphasized by the study (4).

*(ii) NTFPs and Adivasi Livelihood:*

At least six papers have dealt with issues concerning the role of NTFPs in Adivasis' livelihood. NTFP collection emerges as a prominent source of livelihood support in many pockets especially where the access to forest is easier and assured. The participation of households in NTFP collection has varied from 32 per cent to 100 per cent across different habitations (3,6,12). Diverse NTFPs are collected as per the local bio-diversity. For example, in Kondagoan of Chhattisgarh the households collected at least nine NTFPs namely Mahua flower, Mahua seed, Tamarind, Chironji seed, Tendu leaves, Sal seed, Harra, Baheda and Aonla (3). In Kandhamal, Odisha, seven NTFPs namely Mahula, Harida, Bahada, Sal, Bhalia, Kendu, and Siali are gathered (12). The NTFP collection generates considerable employment and income for these Adivasi households. While in Kondagaon households spent 4 to 22 days each for collection of different NTFPs; in Kandhamal NTFP collection generated 136 days of employment vis-a-vis 112 days by agriculture with the quantity collected varying from 91 to 122 kgs across different NTFPs. In terms of income, during 2014-16, the average income generated was Rs. 6755 in Kandhamal in Orissa with Mahua contributing 66 per cent and Harida and Bahada 11 per cent of the income. In Kondagaon of Chhattisgarh the reported annual income from NTFP was Rs 36,410 with Tendu leaves contributing nearly 30 per cent of the revenue during 2019-20(3). The continued significance of NTFP for Adivasis can be gauged from the fact that for forest-dependent Baigas in Achanakmar wildlife

sanctuary, NTFP earnings accounted for 44 per cent and 27 per cent of the total income respectively in the core and buffer areas alleviating poverty in a significant way (6). While the households do use a certain percentage of their collection for self-consumption, bulk of the collection, especially the non-edible products, are sold to various agencies. In Kondagaon, the state marketing federation (CGMFPPF) which has a monopoly over Tendu/Sal procured 54 per cent, with traders and direct sales to consumers accounting for 34 per cent and 12 per cent of the collection respectively. In Achanakmar sanctuary, the households are mainly dependent on traders who do not adhere to MSP. Similarly, in Kandhamal, the households sell mainly in local markets with limited participation from organized agencies like TDCC and Dabur Company. Thus, marketing of NTFPs presents a mixed picture with Adivasis dependent on traders to a great extent and faced with high price variations (6). Only a very rudimentary processing is attempted at local level in the absence of any storage or processing facilities compelling households forego a major share in value created (3). Apart from the dedicated procurement of Tendu/Sal by CGMFPPF, studies have highlighted a couple of interventions which can help improve marketing channels for NTFP collectors. These include FPOs promoted for NTFP collectors in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh (9), and organizing SHG members into a hyacinth based craft-enterprise with suitable technology and marketing linkages in West Bengal which has contributed nearly 56 per cent of family income for the participating women (8).

#### *4. Poverty and Deprivation*

Various assessments have indicated that despite their own struggles and diverse policy measures, Adivasis continue to languish in terms of their living standards and socio-economic conditions. Their livelihoods in general are characterized by state of precarity owing to historical subjugation coupled with widespread deprivation. Some of the papers have attempted to depict the prevailing socio-economic situation of Adivasis confirming the general state of precarity. The average annual household income of Adivasi groups reported in the recent years by three studies varied from Rs 32,000 to Rs 1.11 lakh indicating to their general low-income status (2,6, &8). Lower incomes have led to many kinds of deprivations. The study of Kondhs in Rayagada district of Odisha brought out the fact that during 2017 a significant proportion (63 per cent) of them had failed to meet the minimum calorie status, with considerable difference seen between male (61.4 per cent) and female (64.4 per cent) adults (1). Lack of access to foodgrains, lack of affordability, and weaker welfare programmes are identified as the causal factors of low nutritional status. Thus, attaining food security remains a prominent challenge for Adivasi communities. The study carried out of on tea-garden tribes in Assam who hail from Adivasi background reported that 61.8 per cent of them in 2019 belonged to the below poverty line (BPL) category (7). Lower asset holding and lower education are found to be influencing factors for such modestly high level of poverty. The study of

Baiga tribe revealed that nearly 100 per cent of those living inside forest area belong to the BPL category (6). Another study in Koraput district brought out the relative poverty of tribal farmers in comparison to non-tribal farmers (13). The study highlighted that nearly 58 per cent of the tribal farmers lived in kuccha houses as compared to 12 per cent by non-tribal farmers. Further, 35 per cent of the tribal farmers lacked any kind of agricultural equipment to carry out viable farming besides being unable to buy the needed farm inputs because of low income. Attempts to combine multiple livelihoods, increased dependence on forests, Jhuming, migration, and dependence on moneylenders are some of the features which emerge both as indicators of poverty and coping strategies (2,3,4, and 13).

#### *(5) Governance Issues and Adivasis*

Governance becomes crucial to address developmental challenges as well as resolve enduring conflicts. The colonial governance subjugated and alienated the Adivasis. The post-colonial governance regime besides trying to reverse the ill-effects of the colonial regime tried to 'mainstreaming' the Adivasis. The outcomes of the multi-pronged strategy involving reservation, protection and development have been at best a mixed bag for the Adivasis. The papers under the theme have touched upon many governance and policy issues having bearing on the plight of the Adivasis. Some of the specific issues of governance which have been highlighted in respective sections above are synthesized together in this section with a clear governance focus impinging on the livelihoods of Adivasis.

One major area is the governance of natural resources like forests. Creation of reserve forests has been a major strategy to protect wildlife and bio-diversity. The paper on the working of Achanakmar wildlife sanctuary in Chhattisgarh clearly brings out the dilemma and conflicts faced by the Adivasis (6). No doubt the sanctuary seems to have improved the state of forests, but it has threatened the livelihoods of a PVTG like Baigas including curtailing their rights, The FRA 2006 meant to ensure rights of Adivasis over private and common land has not been effectively implemented. This had a cascading effect in disempowering the gramasabha besides depriving the inhabitants the benefits of welfare schemes. Restoration of rights can help address both conservation and livelihood concerns is highted in another study in Orissa (12). Conservation-based measures especially involving local community like JFM/CFM can aid in both forest regeneration and meet livelihood needs increasing the stakes of people in forests. NTFP-based strategy has emerged as a key measure in this regard. Ineffective implementation can also lead to reverse scenario as shown by the study. Strong arguments are put forth for recognising communities' voice and rights towards putting in place an empowered policy framework.

NTFP-strategy also would need suitable policy linkages to facilitate sustainable collection, processing and marketing. Studies have identified several policies towards this including identifying their inadequacies (3,6,12). The collectors are found disposing off their NTFPs largely in the market. They are under the control of market players given inadequate storage and processing with traders including private companies not ensuring MSP for the produce (3,6). Instances of state-led procurement is also brought out where monopoly procurement with MSP by CGMFPP has enabled the primary collectors get access to organised marketing (3). However, the state-led effort has been found to be limited and faced with many constraints, giving scope for domination by traders. Lack of collectivisation is found to be a major challenge for the NTFPs. Recently, there are efforts to promote community-based organisations for minor forest products. The study on the working of FPOs clearly highlights the potential for collectivisation of NTFP collectors to reap greater benefits (9).

Another natural resource touched upon is river water. A study in Nasik has brought out couple of major issues (11). Construction of dams goes with displacement which has been a major problem for the Adivasis in post-colonial period. Displacement coupled with inadequate rehabilitation can be debilitating. Simultaneously, the study highlighted the discriminatory policy which denied the access to water for the displaced community. Restoration of rights over water and effective rehabilitation through creating a lift irrigation cooperative has helped rebuild the devastated livelihoods for the Adivasis. Thus, pro-community policies giving fair access to natural resources can make a significant positive difference

Several papers have raised policy issues concerning the broader socio-economic development of the Adivasis. These papers pertain to certain specific aspect or intervention linked to economic development. One policy issue pertains to challenge of granting ST status to indentured tea-garden 'Adivasi' workers in Assam who have migrated from elsewhere only to lose their original status (7). The contention of local tribes has come as a major constraint.

A few studies have looked at education of Adivasis. In general, the policies have failed to advance the educational cause of the Adivasis. Similarly, there are severe limitations observed in the policies meant for food security, employment, and housing leading to continued poverty and deprivation. Higher investment and better interventions are needed to address poverty and human development. Agriculture specific policies have been raised by several papers. The spread of modern agriculture has been limited (2,13). Access to inputs, credit, extension and marketing are found to be constrained. Modern agricultural policy wherever introduced has brought in challenges and contradictions by way of increased cost, monocropping, and loss of crop diversity leading to unsustainable practices (4). It is also found that mere GI tags for specific crops of Adivasi farmers may not help them unless accompanied by suitable linkages (5,10). Again, collectivisation for inputs, water and marketing can reduce the vulnerabilities of Adivasis. Policy recommendations to

improve agriculture in Adivasi areas include better access to land, water, inputs, and marketing (2). Procurement of Adivasi products like millets at MSP and promotion of (women) farmers' collectives with adequate equity are part of the policy framework suggested for Adivasi agriculture. Appropriate technology keeping issues of sustainability in view is advocated for Adivasi agriculture. In all these policy measures, as suggested by a study (6), Adivasi lens, gender lens and democratic framework should be combined for the holistic development of Adivasis.

### III

#### CONCLUSION AND ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

The following are the major conclusions from the papers submitted under the theme:

1. The Adivasi landscape depicts a picture of enormous diversity. Though certain kinds of homogenisation are occurring based on religion, economic development, and Adivasi identity yet varied tribes and groups persist asserting their own uniqueness and identities. Neither 'mainstreaming' nor 'modernisation' attempts have brought in binding commonality among the Adivasis. Inter-group conflicts also endure with growing contention over limited resources. Access to and use of land is moving towards private use/ownership from the earlier communal management even as market forces are gaining fast grounds in Adivasi belts.

Other social changes include limited educational attainment which constrain progress in human development. Prevalence of gender bias is noted among many Adivasi communities manifested in many glaring male-female differences.

2. Despite the changing status of forests, the studies reinforce the well-known symbiotic relations between forests and Adivasis. Many policy regimes put in place to address issues of conservation and livelihood have given mixed results. While conflicts have erupted between the two goals in many instances even making Adivasis protest to protect their livelihoods, some semblance of balance has been attained in few other cases.

3. The papers clearly indicate that agriculture supplemented by other means remains the major form of livelihood. A very significant proportion of Adivasis continue to don the role of peasants. Given the constraints of agriculture, Adivasis have tried to diversify into various other sources to supplement their livelihood including NTFP collection. However, much of the diversification is in the nature of self-employment and informal sector with trends of proletarianization complemented by distress migration.

4. Like the larger agriculture, Adivasi agriculture also has been undergoing crucial changes with internal crisis manifested in several ways. Small and marginal holdings predominate with growing fragmentation even as settled agriculture has emerged as a major form. Wherever agriculture is carried out in a dependable way the Adivasi farmers generate some modest returns to ensure their basic food security. In general,

agriculture is plagued by low and uncertain yields with farmers struggling to eke out a decent living. Aggressive introduction of HYV-based technology has fostered monocropping practices threatening crop-diversity.

5. Adivasis continue to languish in terms of their living standards and socio-economic conditions. Most are in a state of precarity owing to historical subjugation and continued deprivation. Severe limitations are observed in the policies meant for food security, employment, and housing accentuating poverty and deprivation calling for better interventions.

6. Governance issue has emerged as a crucial dimension both with regard to natural resources and economic development. Conservation especially involving local community can aid in forest regeneration and help meet livelihood needs increasing the stakes of Adivasis in forests. But conservation measures also have threatened livelihoods wherever rights have been curtailed. Steps like FRA have failed to ensure adequately rights of Adivasis due to poor implementation. Land acquisition and displacement remain contentious with effective rehabilitation continue to pose a challenge. Policy-induced collectivisation efforts are observed in several fields though with limited impact and outreach.

Based on the above synthesis following issues are identified for further discussion: 1) What are the crucial changes in the social and cultural aspects of the Adivasis including their identity owing to changes in their livelihoods and resource base (and vice versa)? 2) How to ensure protection of Adivasi customary and other rights lest they face further alienation and marginalisation?; 3) What are the varied manifestations of the 'Adivasi Question'? How to resolve the 'Adivasi Question'? What can be the unifying or common dimension like class or identity relevant to address the 'Adivasi Question'? Can 'Adivasi Question' serve as a useful framework in the resolution of the historical challenges facing Adivasis? 4) How to revitalise Adivasi Agriculture for a more sustainable livelihood?; 5) What are the lessons for effective governance which can redress the conflict of 'conservation v/s livelihoods amicably in the Adivasi landscapes?.

#### NOTES

1. Year End Review 2022: Ministry of Tribal Affairs; <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1887716>
2. Rural Development Statistics: Section 10 Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes [http://nirdpr.org.in/nird\\_docs/RDS/RDS2014-15/data/sec-10.pdf](http://nirdpr.org.in/nird_docs/RDS/RDS2014-15/data/sec-10.pdf)
3. States like Madhya Pradesh (14.69 percent), Chhattisgarh (7.5 percent), Jharkhand (8.29 percent), Andhra Pradesh (5.7 percent), Maharashtra (10.08 percent), Orissa (9.2 percent), Gujarat (8.55 percent) and Rajasthan (8.86 percent) accounted for over 72 per cent of the total Adivasi population.
4. See, Niti Aayog, Poverty Estimates for Social Groups: 2004-05 and 2011-12; [https://niti.gov.in/planningcommission.gov.in/docs/reports/genrep/rep\\_pov1303.pdf](https://niti.gov.in/planningcommission.gov.in/docs/reports/genrep/rep_pov1303.pdf) downloaded on 11 October 2021.

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