# THE ARCHAEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY OF LANDSCAPE

## Shaping your landscape

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# *The anatomy of dispossession: a study in the displacement of the tribals from their traditional landscape in the Narmada Valley due to the Sardar Sarovar Project*

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## Introduction

After independence, India embarked, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, on an ambitious plan to wrench the country free of British imperialism and to assert its autonomy. Greatly impressed by Stalinist reforms in the Soviet Union, Nehru introduced similar five-year plans in order to develop and modernise the country by building huge dams, power plants, steel plants and, later, nuclear power plants. These development projects have made India one of the most powerful countries in the Third World but have caused the displacement and dislocation of about 5 million people, a number equal to the population displaced during partition of the subcontinent in 1947. The victims were never party to the planning of the projects that would render them homeless and dispossess them of a landscape that they had held for generations. Among the worst culprits were the big dams, proclaimed as 'Secular Temples' of the independent country by Nehru, of which India is the largest manufacturer in the world.

Tyre, automobile and petrochemical plants spring up with official sanction throughout the country, leading to a cultural and spiritual dislocation on a large scale. Flooding of paddy fields in rural areas of Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, for prawn cultivation by multi-national companies, has caused an irreversible transformation of the landscape. Traditional fisher people throughout the coastal areas in India are today forced to seek new occupations because their fishing waters are now exploited by mechanised fishing boats, denying them their regular catch. Mechanised fishing boats exhaust all the catch through their faster but unsustainable fishing practices, which will eventually lead to total dispossession of the landscape of a great majority of the traditional fish workers of India. Most of the people who have been displaced due to these projects have yet to be acquainted with the benefits of development. They have not even been offered proper rehabilitation. Today in the town of Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, for example, once self-sustaining farmers are forced to live in slums and to pull rickshaws to earn their livelihood, after the Barghi Dam displaced them.

Other development projects have also caused dispossession. A public-sector petrochemical plant, in the Raigad district on the coastal belt of Maharashtra, for

example, has polluted the atmosphere of the neighbouring tribal and non-tribal villages to such an extent that today the villagers are forced to sell their land and move into the sprawling metropolis of Bombay. With the excessive increase of tourist movement in India during the past decade, the hospitality industry has also altered the natural landscape in various parts of the country, such as the coastal state of Goa. The increasing size of urban centres is also dispossessing neighbouring tribal and non-tribal populations. The Warli tribal communities who once occupied large tracts of forested landscape near Bombay, for example, are slowly being forced to accept the urban slums and concrete jungles as their new landscape. Either their land and houses have been bought from them or they have been forcibly evicted by government bodies, builders and land developers. Similar alteration of the landscape is occurring in the heavily forested regions of the Himalayas, where excessive logging in violation of environmental and ecological codes has brought about a drastic ecological imbalance, causing the displacement of the inhabitants. Tribals inhabiting the National Reserve Forest and Protected Areas are being forcibly evicted and made to resettle outside the Protected Areas. This dispossession is carried out on the pretext that the tribals disturb the wildlife and are responsible for degradation of the landscape in which they live. Recent liberalisation of the Indian economy has greatly accelerated the transformation and dispossession of the rural landscape.

The concept of landscape is central to my discussion. I define it as a combination of land, water and forest, with which the population is culturally, physically and spiritually associated. It is the destruction of these associations that brings about a people's dispossession from their landscape. The symbiotic relationship that prevails between the population and landscape is consciously severed by the policies of the contemporary state. In order to fulfil its national objectives, the State destroys the landscape without consideration for the lives of millions who are dependent upon it for survival. In this chapter, I argue that the Government's insensitivity emanates from a colonial ideology still strongly rooted in the consciousness of the country despite half a century's independence. The Government's attitude is reinforced by the intelligentsia, among them anthropologists and archaeologists who have yet to divorce themselves from the colonial heritage in their scholarly research.

It is in the above context, primarily with regard to my experience working along with the tribal people affected by the Sardar Dam, that I ask, who are the tribals? What is their changing relationship to their landscape? I show how dispossession occurs and how the attitude of Indian anthropologists and archaeologists helps to perpetuate such dispossession.

## The Sardar Dam and its impact

By the mid-1970s almost all the major rivers in India were dammed, to fulfil the objectives of providing drinking water and water for irrigation to drought prone areas, and to generate electricity. The dams, along with pesticides and fertilisers,

became a necessity in areas where intensive farming was being pursued, to usher in a Green Revolution. But the delay in the damming of the Narmada was not surprising, as agreement among the three states of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra on the distribution of the cost and benefits took around twenty years. It was not until 1978 that the awards were divided. The construction of the first dam on the Narmada, namely the Sarda Sarovar Project, consisting of a 165-m high, 1,210-m long dam and riverbed powerhouse, began only in 1987.

The Sardar Sarovar Project was among the two super dams, thirty major dams and 3,000 minor projects designed to transform the Narmada region, inhabited by around 20 million people including a large population of tribal groups. The most published and oft repeated justification offered by the project's proponents was that it would bring huge benefits in the droughtprone areas of Kutch and Saurashtra in Gujarat, by providing 40 million people with drinking water and irrigation to 1.8 million ha of land in the State. These huge benefits were contrasted to the 'sacrifice' of comparatively few people, and the land to be submerged was described as 'steep, rocky ground and degraded forest'.

While the work commenced simultaneously on both the super dams, funded by the World Bank, only the construction of Sardar Sarovar proceeded at a rapid speed. The recommendation of the Independent Review headed by Bradford Morse, international pressure and the people of the valley's resolve not to budge from their landscape, forced the World Bank to withdraw from the project in 1992. There are two aspects to the major impact of the dam: the direct impact on the people and the environmental impact. The impact on the environment directly affects the inhabitants, who, as I discuss later, have an intense relationship with their landscape. The dam will cause both direct and indirect displacement, flooding large areas and altering the surrounding landscape. According to the monitoring and evaluation team for Maharashtra,

> The Sardar Sarovar Dam is expected to impound waters to the full reservoir level of 455 feet. It will submerge 37,000 hectares (92,500 acres) of land in the three states. The canal and irrigation system aggregates to 75, 000 kilometres, submerging 85,000 hectares (212,500 acres) of land. The length of the water catchment of the dam is stated to be 123 kilometres. Conservative estimates place the number of displaced at approximately 152,000 persons (about 27,000 families as per Government estimates), residing in 245 villages of these states to be affected by the submergence.

It adds:

> These figures reveal the magnitude of direct and indirect dislocation. No one really knows the exact magnitude of the likely displacement in all its dimensions, and the spin off effects are yet to be measured.
>
> (Anon. 1992)

## The emergence of popular protest movements

In the last decade, a growing awareness of the human and ecological devastation such projects cause has led to the creation of numerous people's movements opposing them. People's movements recruit their membership primarily among people affected, with support from other quarters of society. There have been the movements against a missile testing range in Balipal (Orissa) and against a dam in Silent Valley (Kerala). At the moment, two prominent movements are continuing their struggle against an army firing range in Netrahat (Bihar) and the Sardar Sarovar Dam (Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh) on the River Narmada in Western India. These movements take the form of a socio-political struggle by the affected people, aimed at gaining respite. They are led by local community leaders, sometimes working with urban activists against their immediate foe—the implementing government agencies. Larger questions are raised pertaining to human rights, the State's ecological ethics, the Nehruvian paradigm of development, and involvement of the local population at the decision-making level about their own landscape. The right to displace, and the degree of interference by the Government in the lives of local or tribal populations who had been in existence much before the formation of the contemporary state, are both called into question. The earlier history of resistance in some of the areas during the colonial era has strengthened their resolve to fight for their rights.

Filing petitions against the governmental agencies, forming blockades of arterial roads and highways, undertaking hunger strikes and courting mass arrests are some of the most powerful strategies used by these movements. Unlike resistance movements during the colonial era, which were more local riots' and 'war-like campaigns', modern people's movements have been generally peaceful in nature. The harshness of governmental repression of socio-political movements in post-independence India, particularly the extreme-left, proMaoist, Naxalite movement, remains fresh in the minds of local leaders. Equally, the strategic benefits of Gandhian ideals, as they were realised in the post-independence political movements led by Vinoba Bhave and Jaiprakash Narayan, are too recent to disregard, particularly since the leaders of some contemporary campaigns participated in these political movements in the mid-1970s (see Guha 1983).

The social aims of contemporary, localised people's movements have been evident in their region of activity. But the need to co-ordinate resistance at the state or national level has led members of the local movements to come together under one umbrella. The Jan Vikas Andolan (People's Development Movement) was founded in 1989, the Bharat Jan Adolan (Indian People's Movement) in 1991 and the National Alliance of People's Movements in 1992. These organisations have enabled a number of local people's movements to come together on a single platform, to share their experiences, strengthen ideas and provide each other with solidarity. They are endeavouring to provide an

alternative to the mainstream political process, and popular participation is intense. It was my involvement as a student activist in Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement) against the building of Sardar Sarovar Dam that enabled me to work with the people who were going to be displaced and dispossessed and to oppose the construction of such a destructive dam.

## Are the tribals an indigenous group?

The people who inhabited the area to be submerged consist of both tribals living on the banks of the river where the hills and canyons of the Vindhyas and Satapuras ranges are fissured by a network of tributaries, and people belonging to the dominant Hindu society situated upstream, where the river widens. Although a considerable number of villages of the dominant society will also be submerged, I discuss the former only because it is particularly with them that I have worked. The country of the tribals living on the banks of the Narmada has no motorable roads, no primary schools or health clinics. Despite the trend immediately after partition to assimilate tribal populations into the mainstream society, this area, due to its inaccessible terrain, has preserved its indigenous values and outlook. The various tribal groups, Tadvi, Vasva, Paura, Bhailala, Rattawa and Nayar, speak different languages, though most of the men understand the official language of their respective states. So the Tadvis in Gujarat speak Gujarati along with Bhili, whereas the Vasava of Maharashtra speak Marathi along with Bhili. Women in these communities are, however, unable to understand the non-tribal languages, due to their infrequent contact with outside cultures.

The constitution of India includes these populations among the 'Scheduled Tribes' which encompass 700 different groups of people comprising a population of 60 million, living in various socio-economic conditions (Ghurye 1962). The framers of the constitution provided these groups with special privileges and concessions, in order to integrate them into the national life. There has been continuous debate, particularly since 1947, over the extent to which these tribal groups can be considered indigenous. I define *indigenous,* in the Indian context, as a population who, prior to the *Pax Britannica,* had from time immemorial maintained a symbiotic physical and cultural relationship with a particular landscape, who were largely outside of the caste system of the mainstream Hindu society and who were politically independent of this system. Though cultural and economic contact did occur between these two groups, the indigenous one maintained its distinctive character. I distinguish my position from that of those who argue that the mainstream Hindu society is also indigenous by drawing attention to the fact that the tribals were the original habitants of large tracts of land in India, mainly following a hunting and gathering or pastoral subsistence pattern, with at most a chiefdom-based political system. In this respect they could be compared to the indigenous population of America and the Australian Aborigines.

There are numerous references to these tribes in Sanskrit and Hindu literature. Among the earliest, the Vedas have given a particularly complex character to their history. Throughout India they have been called *adivasi, admijati, vanyajatis, girijans* or *pahadia.* Most of these early terms explicitly mean the early settler, the forest settler or just the outsider. The term *adivasi,* in particular, denotes one who is an inhabitant from the earliest times and who still lives as people lived in earliest times. The other indigenous terms in use today are all of Sanskrit origin.

There has been a considerable amount of exchange between the tribal and the Hindu society. This appears to have made it difficult for historians to comprehend and differentiate between the two. Prior to British annexation, most of those now called tribal peoples were either unconscious of their ethnic identity or called themselves 'people', *vis-à-vis* outsiders, in their distinctive speech. It was the British who designated them 'tribals', to distinguish them from Hindus and Muslims, since they were considered to have 'animistic' religious beliefs. In recent times in Indian academic circles, a new theory has arisen rendering all present in the Hindu hierarchy, from Brahmins to Shudras, Ati-Shudras and the tribals as the indigenous population of India. Not surprisingly, this view comes at a time when in India, large social and political concessions are being given to the vulnerable and weaker sections of the society. Another group of scholars refuse to recognise these groups as indigenous because they have reported the usage of factorymade garments by them and the presence of pictures of Hindu gods and goddesses in their homes. The process of modernisation has indeed crept into the village market, causing the substitution of new goods for traditional material culture. Leather shoes and wooden combs have given way to plastic substitutes, just as hand-woven cloth has been substituted by the mill-made cloth. Though Sanskritisation of these tribals has a long history, the mere presence of pictures of Hindu gods or goddesses from an old calendar does not 'detribalise' these groups or make them part of the Hindu society and culture.

In post-independence India there have been several attempts to define these groups of people by listing identifying characteristics. More often than not, these lists themselves serve better to illustrate the prejudices and the presumptions of the compilers than any real distinction between tribals and non-tribals. Thus the Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in 1952 listed seven characteristic tribal features:

- isolation in forest and hills,
- Negrito, Australoid to Mongoloid racial stock,
- primitive tribal dialect,
- primitive occupations,
- carnivorous diet,
- naked or semi-naked attire,
- and 'love of drink and dance'.

These characterisations show a clear colonial bias, premised upon the cultural and racial inferiority of the tribal population (see Nehru 1955; Verrier 1955; Majumdar 1955). It is this colonial bias that guides the planners of the country when they go ahead with big dams like the Sardar Sarovar without taking the marginalised tribals into account. A similar bias precludes any protest from most practising anthropologists and archaeologists.

In its 1982 Operational Manual Statement, the World Bank seeks to define 'tribal people' as the object of a special policy measure in the Indian context. The comprehensive definition identifies the vulnerable nature of the group, but, consistent with its neo-colonial ideals and aims, the World Bank conveniently ignores the validity of its own definition in practice. It needed a powerful people's movement such as Narmada Bachao Andolan to force the World Bank to appoint an independent review committee to gauge the destructive nature of its own funding policies. The Operational Manual states:

> The term 'tribal people' refers here to ethnic groups typically with stable, low energy, sustained yield economic systems, as exemplified by hunter gatherers, shifting or semi permanent farmers, herders or fishermen. They exhibit in varying degree many of the following characteristics:
>
> i) geographically isolated or semi-isolated,
> ii) unacculturated or only partially acculturated into the social norms of the dominant society,
> iii) non-monetized or partially monetized; production largely for subsistence and independent of the national economic system,
> v) non-literate and without a written language,
> vi) linguistically distinct from the wider society,
> vii) having an economic lifestyle largely dependent on the specific natural environment,
> viii) identify closely with one particular territory,
> ix) possessing indigenous leadership, but little or no national representatives and few, if any, political rights as individuals or collectively, partly because they do not participate in the political process,
> x) having loose tenure over their traditional lands, which for the most part is not accepted by the dominant society nor accommodated by its courts; and having weak enforcement capabilities against encroachers; even when tribal areas have been delineated.

To a large extent, the above definition embraces the specific attributes peculiar to the indigenous groups in India. These characteristics are obvious among the tribal groups in Narmada Valley. They live a highly sustainable lifestyle and depend heavily on forest produce for subsistence. Until recently they were hunter-gatherers and shifting agriculturists. Due to their geographic isolation, they have

been only partially, if at all, Sanskritised or otherwise acculturated into the dominant Hindu society. The tribals in the valley who live close to the Hindu temples such as Shoolpaneshwar are relatively closer to Hindu culture than those far off from such temples. The authority of the indigenous leadership is also highly rooted in the traditional psyche and until the recent coming of non-governmental agencies they consciously avoided participation in the national political process.

Tribal communities in other parts of India can to a great extent also be called 'indigenous', and although they have contacts with the Hindu society, they have been successful in preserving their indigenous characteristics. Disregard for this difference between their culture and the dominant culture would amount to denial of the self-proclamation of the Nagas and Mizo in northeast India, who have been ruthlessly subdued by the Indian state, and the recent demands for statehood by the Stanthal and Munda tribes of the Jharkhand region in eastern India.

## A changing relationship to the landscape

In the forest and hills bordering the Narmada River, tribal groups formerly sustained themselves by hunting and food-gathering. At a later period, which is difficult to date, their livelihood became dependent on shifting agriculture or *Jhum* (Ramakrishna and Patnaik 1992). This is a land-use pattern, still used in northeast India, that involves slashing the vegetation, burning the dried slash before the onset of the monsoons, raising a mixture of crops on a temporarily nutrientrich soil for a year or two, fallowing the plot for regrowth of natural vegetation and eventually returning to the same plot for another cropping phase after a few years. *Jhum* was not just a characteristic land-use pattern, it is a way of life still practised today. It had radically affected the cultural landscape of the people whose evolving cultural life revolved around it. The rich and diverse dance and music forms of the various tribes in the valley are related to the various *Jhum* operations and performed at all festivities associated with the *Jhum* calendar. These include feasting, drinking rice beer and slaughtering pigs.

As among other tribal societies in India, the concept of sacred groves is widespread. Each village has a small patch of forest preserved in its virgin state. It was believed that deities representing various elements of nature such as sun, rain and fire resided in these sacred groves, along with the spirits of their ancestors. Each grove has a residing deity, which some of the Bhil communities in the valley still worship during various ceremonies. These groves are a direct legacy of the shifting agriculturists who comprehended the ecological paradox typical of humid tropical regions. Here the vegetation has a higher nutrient capital than the soil, necessitating the practice of slash and burn. The practice is nonetheless liable to cause the loss of rich species of tropical forests, which were therefore sanctified as sacred to protect them from destruction. The attitude of pre-British village communities toward sacred groves is reflected in the statement that the British traveller Francis Buchanan made near Karwas in northern Karanataka: 'The forests are property of the gods of the villages in which they are situated

and the trees ought not to be cut without having leave from the Gauda or headman of the village…who were there as priest to the temple of the village God' (quoted in Gadgil and Chandran 1992).

In the nineteenth century, British administrators, who were unacquainted with the importance of such cultivation for subsistence, sought to put an end to shifting cultivation throughout India. They saw slash and burn as destructive of forests and inconsistent with orderly administration. They made shifting agriculture illegal, 'reserved' the forest, and made it a state property by establishing sources of revenue there. The forest that regenerated on areas of past cultivation, other ordinary forest and the virgin sacred groves were all treated alike, causing considerable devastation. The remnants of the colonial alteration of the landscape are still obvious and remembered by village elders. Reduced access to land coincided with population increase, gradually leading people to adopt a more intensive pattern of land use. The *Jhum* cycle (the fallow period between two successive croppings) of shifting agriculture, which was never entirely abandoned, was reduced from a twenty-year time span to less than five years. Permanent fields became a common feature of the new landscape, together with heavy reliance on domestic animals such as goats, which not only survived the worst drought conditions but were also used as meat or taken to the local market to be sold. This led to a few minor transformations of the cultural landscape too, as the tribesmen came into closer contact with the larger Hindu society. The inclusion of gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, particularly Shiva, was one of the most obvious additions. Today both the tribal and the non-tribal people regard each grain of gravel from the River Narmada as the embodiment of Shiva. They remained, however, largely isolated from national life, even during the days of the Quit India Movement when the country had risen in revolt against the imperial rulers. Aurora reports that, 'In 1942 when all of British India was rocked by the struggles of nationalists, only a few people in Alirajpur knew about it. The tribals were not even remotely aware of the nationalist movement in India' (Aurora 1972).

The River Narmada has played the most important role in the tribal people's way of life and constitutes the final part of their triad of existence, the land, forest and water that encompass both the physical and the cultural landscape. For the tribals, the goddess Narmada is their divine mother who has nourished them and their ancestors and also nourishes their children. This timeless link with the river is epitomised by the symbolic importance of the river's water in all their religious rituals. Physical usage of the river other than for the normal chores is restricted to fishing, which can be carried out only by specific, traditional fish-worker groups among the tribals. Along with the river, use of forest reveals close interaction with their landscape. This is forcefully expressed in their houses, whose major components (teak for pillars and beams, bamboo for walls, baked mud tiles for roofing and various plants for ropes and storage baskets) are all harvested in the immediate neighbourhood.

Most of the permanent fields were not registered as revenue land with the local colonial authority, as the owner would have had to pay an annual tax. Any attempt by the external administration to regularise them as revenue land was fiercely resisted. The Bhils, who became famous for such resistance in the nineteenth century, created their own tribal kingdoms, taking advantage of their isolation to maintain their own cultural and economic practices. Existing landowners, along with those who were using or creating new fields, were termed 'encroachers'. Those who had possessed the landscape from a timeless past were deemed trespassers. Derecognition of tribal life made traditional land use illegal, creating the colonial foundation for the justification today of the construction of dams that deny tribal people's very right to exist. The Forest Department constituted during colonial rule and further consolidated after independence has played a significant role in changing the relationship of people towards their landscape. Forest officials reinforced the status of tribals as 'encroachers' by denying them rights to the forest and its produce. They levied fines and bribes from the encroacher as a precondition of continued access to their traditional resources and the seasonal activities of sowing and harvesting their land. These are now discharged by surrendering part of the harvest to government employees. A hostile relationship thus developed between the tribal cultivators and the same Forest Department officials who permitted illegal denudation of the forest by timber contractors from neighbouring towns. This double denial of their traditional rights has had an adverse effect on tribal morale. Until the advent of the people's movements, some believed that they would have to accept whatever the Government did.

In the last 150 years, such a process of alienation and dispossession of the landscape has occurred in almost all the tribal regions in India, and it still continues. The earlier exploitation of the colonial regime has been followed by an equally insensitive neo-colonial Government in the independent state. In some cases, complete displacement and dispossession of indigenous people has resulted.

## The dislocation, an experience in an alien landscape

Tracing the ultimate dislocation of the people by the Sardar Sarovar Dam places this discussion within the realm of the politics of development, the politics of big dams, the exaggerated power and irrigation needs of the country, gross violation of the environment and, finally, the high consumption pattern of modern societies all over the world. These are issues widely discussed elsewhere and are largely beyond the scope of this discussion, except for those tribals who have been settled and rehabilitated by the Government. For these people, their relationship with a contrasting landscape of the plains, absolutely alien to their culture, has been a physically, culturally, religiously and psychologically humiliating experience for them.

Tribals taken from the first-phase submergence villages of both Maharashtra and Gujarat have been settled and rehabilitated. Some were virtually compelled to undertake this step. They saw the walls of the dam spring up before their eyes. They had to move 'voluntarily'. The Government forcibly exerted considerable pressure on others to relocate. In some cases this was accompanied by serious discrepancies in government practice, when tribal communities were shown a specific piece of land but the land allotment was cancelled after it had been sanctioned. There have also been instances where more than one person has been allocated the same piece of land. The tribals were so insecure about their newly resettled life that they continued also to occupy their land in the submergence zone.

Elimination of access to the Narmada and the produce of its adjoining forest has resulted in changed consumption patterns in the new colonies: cereals have replaced fish and meat. Daily food consumption has fallen to less than 2,000 calories per day as a direct consequence of low yields and poor employment opportunities. Where only cash can obtain the people's requirements, self-sufficiency has been reduced, creating indebtedness in a market economy. People now have to purchase items such as grains, oil, vegetables, pulses and seeds formerly harvested from the local landscape. Formerly unheard-of agricultural inputs such as fertilisers and pesticides have to be bought for their new land. Lack of cash has made wage labour a necessity, if and where it can be found. The large herds of cattle and goats symbolising possession of large tracts of land are also now threatened, as inadequate grazing land has to be shared with the local population, causing regular skirmishes between the two. Their new houses are sheds made of tin sheets which were intended as accommodation during a transitional period of six months but, after eighteen months, are becoming a permanent testimony to the drastic change they had to make. The monitoring and evaluation team for Maharashtra reports, 'These are small, hot in summer and cold in winter and cannot house cattle. The size of the plot to be given to the people is about 60 square metres, which perhaps compares with the smallest of the houses in the submerged villages (where the houses could be as large as 100 square meters)' (Alvares and Billarey 1988).

The tribals, whose relationship with their original landscape is so intense, face experiences in an alien landscape that deny their human rights to exist in a culture of their own.

## An attitudinal problem

The displacement and dispossession of the rural masses has been aggravated in recent times by the proponents of development and progress. Dislodging populations has been justified by a colonial assumption that because the tribals have a culture based on a lower level of technology and quality of life, it is bound to give way to a culture with superior technology and a higher quality of life. Most organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, working

with tribals reveal a messianic zeal to bring them into the mainstream of national life. Interestingly enough, however, their dance and music forms were preserved so as to exhibit them during national and international functions. Verrier writes of this trend in post-independence India:

> The ambitious programmes of the education reform and the change now being initiated by most State Governments, while bringing many economic and social benefits to the people are likely to bring an end to the older values, good and bad everywhere is apparent, this is not matched by a good interest in or respect for tribal culture. You cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs, and continued existence of the tribes as tribes is regarded as of less importance than the march of civilisation. This policy has already created many examples of Homo Duplex.
>
> (Verrier 1955:19)

Unfortunately, the view that their culture is inferior to the dominant culture has permeated into academic organisations such as the Anthropological and Archaeological Surveys of India, fulfilling the colonial aims of the British and further perpetuating the ideals of detribalisation. Thus, Majumdar, one of the earliest anthropological advisers to the government, advocated:

> the only practical solution to the tribal problem in the present situation would therefore lie in the integration of the tribal people in the national democratic set up in India…[thus] it is essential that economic and educational standards of the tribal groups should be brought on par with the rest of the people. But to achieve this objective, the different tribal cultures should be scientifically studied.
>
> (Majumdar 1955:29)

Even today, both organisations refuse to break free from a neo-colonial time warp and acknowledge the indigenous identity of the tribals. They continue to perpetuate the assimilationist school of thought and indulge in activities that are intended to empower these illiterate 'poor' masses of people and bring them to the threshold of the modern civilisation. Viduta Joshi of the Gandhi Labour Institute in Ahmedabad asserts, commenting on the tribals of the Narmada Valley, 'I have extensively travelled in tribal areas for the last twenty years and I have observed their behaviour, I have formed an opinion that tribals want change' (Joshi 1991). This engrained pro-colonial and messianic conviction amongst the intelligentsia, particularly the anthropologists and archaeologists of the state-owned bodies and certain university departments in India, is partly responsible for the dispossession of these tribals. By perpetuating an ideological edifice that considers the tribals as inferiors who must be brought into the fold of the dominant society, they fail to accept the basic human dignity and right to cultural identity of the group they study. If this is the outlook among the

intelligentsia who have frequent contact with the tribal lifestyle then other members of the mainstream society with a much narrower outlook will allow such gross violations of human rights as has occurred in the case of the Sardar Sarovar Project without a murmur.

We must be more sensitive while working with tribals. The endeavours of professional archaeologists and anthropologists should not be restricted to a purely academic description of other cultures, but should communicate to the larger world that their lifestyle is sustainable. Through our research we can demonstrate that these groups of people are highly vulnerable to the global market forces that threaten to make paupers out of once-proud human beings. It is essential to lobby in the decision-making corridors of the world and to strengthen laws to protect their rights. Our advantageous position as professionals imposes upon us the onus of conveying their concern to the larger world. We have to convince the governments of countries like India, where there are large populations of tribals in minority and highly marginalised situations, that their rights to the traditional resources have to be protected. They cannot be sacrificed in the name of 'development' and 'progress' just because many will benefit from their being further marginalised. A number of activist organisations are fighting for the rights of these people. We, as professionals, can provide solidarity to their struggle and, through our academic research, sensitise the decision-making bodies.

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