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Keywords: Discriminating Social Structures, Empowering Religious Resources, Development, Economic development

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Discriminating Social Structures and Empowering Religious Resources: A View on Interaction between Vulnerable Groups and Development

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We are at the cross-road now in our vision and practice of development. "The project of development has been subjected to much criticism and rethinking in the recent years in the midst of which agenda of development has been broadened to include human development from mere economic development and rise in per capita income."[1]

1. Journeying through the Evolution of 'Development'

The above quotation shows us the shifts that have taken place in the very conception of 'development.' Development theorists identify three post-world War II phases of development. In the first phase (1947-1949), the liminal phase between the world war and the beginning of the cold war, the world grappled with the future after an extreme crisis. In this period, development was seen as a 'work of hope.'[2] It primarily aimed at alleviating poverty. It did not go beyond economic growth. In the second phase (1949—1989) of the cold war, development entered the domain of politics, application and administration. In 1960, development was defined as 'growth with change,' referring to economic and cultural change, influenced by structural functionalism.[3] Development thus meant a simultaneous transformation in

multiple dimensions such as polity, economics and culture. In the mid 1970s, there again occurred a shift of focus in development which aimed at a decent standard of living for all humans, in line with the basic human rights as defined in the UN charter, and measured by 'human development indicators.'[4] In the third phase (1990-), the natural environment and its ecology became integrated into the development discourse, and 'sustainable development' became the watchword. Sustainable development drew attention to marginal regions and people, like the gold miners in the Amazon, the peasants in Africa, the hill tribes in Thailand etc., who were previously rather ignored.[5] Development had little to do with equity, justice or with people and social relations since the subject matter at that time was growth and not distribution. It was in this context that the UN General Assembly resolution called for the renewal of political will to invest in people and their well-being in what could be the trend setter for the next millennium, and set up a special committee in the year 2000 to review the process of development.[6] Following these, a whole array of new discourses of development, such as Amartya Sen's idea of development as freedom (i.e., development as expansion of substantive freedom to achieve alternative functions), development as human dignity and human rights,[7] development as 'global responsibility,' development as cultivation of 'self'[8] etc., has acquired significance in the development theories. In the context of rural areas in India and its marginal people, the concept of development as human dignity, development as freedom and the notion of integral development which includes ecology assume significance for this article.

2. Religion as a Protagonist of Human Dignity in Process of Development

If development is understood as promotion/enhancement of overall human dignity, religions can be seen as contributors to the process of development in countries like India and Africa, also because they have the potentiality to effect social emancipation and uphold human dignity, which they have imparted to the

oppressed sections of society. Recent debates on religious conversions in India highlight the fact that the converts moved to a new religion not so much for religious reasons but to change their socio-economic status. Oddie and Forrester's works on conversion to Christianity[9] show that while conversion is the story that narrates how vulnerable groups gained social mobility, self-respect and dignity, it is also very well synchronized with the spread of a particular religion—which promised social emancipation and political security. Chad's (2008) work on Satnami Christians, Jose Maliekal's research on the Madiggas of Konasema in Andhra Pradesh and Anthony Sebastin's study on the Christian Paraiyars of Chengelpet district of Tamilnadu are other examples.[10]

Is Hinduism in any way coextensive with development? The answer to this questions is neither no nor yes. As for the major Hinduism, when it was spread to the west by the Indian Diaspora, it did contribute to the construction of their identity in a new land. It sustained their identity in the new place as people of another ethnicity and accompanied them in their initiative to maintain their self-worth. In that sense, for the upstart Indian middle class it has played a role of accompaniment and support in the process of their development.[11]

As regards the folk/village Hinduism, its relationship with economic development is multi-faceted. The studies done by the Subalterns Studies project and the like, highlight the role of religion as a subaltern agency in the process of emancipation of the marginalised peoples. The phenomena of Ayya Vazhi, Ramnami and Satnampanth movements show that the religious articulations of such kinds have emboldened people to appropriate the symbols and practices of purity, to defy and discontinue the old oppressive economic activities forced upon them by the caste system, which were seen as polluting and thus subjugating them. They sought to break the shackles of economic oppression and to explore new opportunities for economic pursuits that drastically altered and uplifted their economic situation, as we see in the case of the

Shanars of Tamilnadu. My own research in the district of Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu indicates that the religious terrain has enabled the subalterns to gain new socio-economic positions. Besides, it can become a site for them not only to display their newly gained economic status, but also to assert their new social ascendancy whereby contestation and inversion of the old social norms of caste hierarchy are triggered off by the subalterns. Thus the sublatern religious initiaives enabled the vulnerable groups to restore their lost human dignity. The above mentioned studies demonstrate that Weber's thesis on the negative role of Indian religions[12] needs to be reformulated.

Further, the latest theorising on 'development' as the promotion of basic human values show that religion and development can move closer to each other in this mission. For instance, Quarles Van Ufford and Giri point out that development has to become a praxis, engaging in the recovery of the original meaning of intervention: *intervenire*, a process of 'coming in between' which involves much more than 'doing'. It should involve love, care and good will.[13] Accordingly, they suggest that development has to be reconstituted as "a relational field of sharing and contestation where coming in between involves establishing an appropriate relationship between care of the self and care of the other."[14] Religion, as a moral interlocutor in any culture, can positively and constructively 'intervene' in cultural practices and social institutions, and can effectively become a partner with 'development' in constituting, confirming and sustaining an appropriate relationship between care of the self and care of the other. However, a caveat is in place here: "care for the other carries the seeds of paternalism."[15] Both the projects of development and religious engagement in the world should take the necessary precaution not to be trapped by a kind of condescending paternalism.

As Giri points out, understanding the project of development in terms of the human (human right, human dignity) has helped only the broadening of the agenda of development, which perhaps

lacks its complementary component of 'deepening.' Giri in his book suggests that this deepening can be actualized by bringing both an aesthetic and an ethical perspective and mode of participation to this field of relationship.[16]

Further, the care of the poor and the vulnerable, which is now the concern of the ethics of development has been, for centuries, the legacy of most religions' teaching on love. All religions, be they Christianity, Islam, Jainism or Hinduism, in varying degrees, have given some importance or the other to the care of the vulerable people, the 'poor' and the needy[17] especially in rural India. Religion's proactive role in the development project calls for new ways of theorising which will take into account, on the one hand the different concepts of the 'other' given in different religious traditions, and on the other hand, reinterpret them in a manner that will pave the way for a better understanding of the self that will lead to better inter-religious dialogues/ praxis-collaborations to improve the lots of the vulnerable groups in rural India. Such efforts will bring together different religions not so much to fight with one another to prove one's supremacy over the other but to work for the well-being of humanity especially for the vulnerable groups. In order to do so, the philosophers and theologians of each religious tradition have to highlight each one's value-specific and praxis-specific ethos and its unique selling point that would benefit the present and the future of humanity.

The folk religions, which do not have such official spoke-persons though, do not remain indifferent to the process of development but connected to it directly or indirectly in different ways and capacities.

3. Increasing Diversity of Rural Realities and Folk Religions

One of the felt impacts of the process of globalization on Indian society is that it has given rise to new forms of diversities not only in the urban areas but also in the rural areas. The homogenous agrarian feudal society which had for centuries maintained a

particular type of dependency relationship between the high-caste landlord and the low caste labourers is experiencing instability now. The families and children of low caste background have began to have access to education and employment, and they have obtained multiple identities from such options including others provided by the modern nation state and its democratic political processes. Membership in a political party or in an NGO etc.. has come their way which did not exist earlier. It cannot be denied that these changes have brought about instability, fluidity and diversity in the village environments. The vulnerable groups have started going to schools and colleges, building houses, wearing clothes and living life styles which are not very different from those of the dominant castes. Though these changes take place more rapidly in the urban areas than the rural India, yet such changes do get transposed to the villages as well. The emerging diversities, more often than not, do get more pronounced and displayed in the villages during the celebrations and festivals of the village folk deities. During the celebration of the festival of the folk deities the vulnerable groups do demonstrate their newly obtained economic developments. For instance, during my filed-works in the years 2001-2004, I witnessed ever-growing extravaganza and festivity of *kodai* (three day folk religious festival so called in Tirunelveli district in Tamilnadu) by the Dalits. It apparently indicates that the folk religious festivals can function as an arena for displaying vulnerable peoples' newly acquired socio-economic status, and for their celebration of the autonomy of social identity. For instance, the spectacular display of fire-works which goes on for a continuous half-an-hour or so after *vettai* (ritual hunting) is said to be one of the distinguishing features of the *kodai* of the Dalits in Naduvakurichi village. They spend about sixty-five thousand rupees for the fire-works. For the vulnerable group, which was oppressed and kept voiceless for centuries, the fire-works do speak for their newly gained social ascendancy. Similarly, some other rituals like *samiyattam* (possession dance) etc.. were performed by the Dalits much more pompously than in other places. Speaking about the grand

celebration of *kodai,* Mines notes that they "build up fame or 'bigness' (*perumai)* for their community through largess and dense display. The *kodai* was virtually and aurally packed. Energy was palpable, as many young men were for the first time seized in possession by the gods. They enlarged, renewed, and decorated the shrine elaborately. They rented a sound system to blare music across and beyond Yanaimangalam's fields to reach neighboring villages."[18]

Thus folk religions become a site for the representations of the collective self of the vulnerable groups—the self which is developed, feels confident and dignified, and articulates itself and its level of development through symbolic actions, performances and metaphors.

4. Community Participation, De-centralized Governance and Folk Religions

When we pay attention to how the marginal people organize the celebration of the folk temple festivals, we realize that they have in place a very good system of de-centralised governance and community participation that elicits co-operation from almost all members of the rural community. This system come handy in many ways for the rural development. It has been well recorded by many writers how the celebration of rural festival involves a thorough preparation and meticulous planning that involve the villagers and the community as a whole. Corporate planning and corporate thinking begins to dominate the village life once the village community decides to host a festival for the deity. Accordingly, collective interest takes precedence over individual commitments. The habits and attitudes of giving cooperation for the common cause are doubtless learnt and transmitted in the celebration of folk religious festivals. Now, in the context of working for the rural development through the bodies like SHG's (Self Help Groups), experiences of collaboration and cooperation learnt thorough the celebration of folk festivals can become very valuable not only to elicit support from the people but also to

identify the like-minded folks who can become effective agents of SHG's structure. Further, the folk religious festivals provide a platform to carry out the process of rural development by the people very effectively. In view of the festival, the village as a whole gets geared up to provide hospitality and infrastructural facilities to the guests who come to attend the festival and the rural groups do deliberately make it a occasion to demand from the local government bodies many such things as laying of new roads to the village, street lights and drinking water facilities etc..Such demands are often complied by the concerned government authorities lest they incur the wrath of the local gods.

For instance, in one of the villlages, the Dalit *samiyadie (*the shaman so called in South Tamilnadu) made use of this occasion of divination for negotiation with the local MLAs and other administrative officers for the implementation of some welfare schemes for the Dalit village. I heard the *samiyadie* telling the MLA "I have blessed you every year, raised you up to this level and taken care of your family. But what have you done for me and for my people? For the last six months they are without proper drinking water. No lights in their streets. If you leave them in misery, you cannot please me". To this the MLA replied "S*ami* (god), Do not turn your anger against me. Something went wrong somewhere. I will immediately take care of it all." And when I visited the village the next year, the infrastructural facilities had improved considerably. In this context, it is to be noted that the favours are demanded in the name of folk gods and goddesses. But these demands are often met because neglecting these demands amounts to displeasing the gods. It might be that in most cases these are done more out of fear than out of piety or reverence for the deity. And it seems that the fear factor becomes the context which is capitalized upon by the vulnerable groups for the rural development.

5. Individual Interests and Community Values in Market Economy and Folk Religions

Market economy in third-world countries like India has helped marginal groups to get new jobs and triggered off initiatives among them, in small ways, to compete in the open market. Thus the life situations of these groups and of their villages have improved. But however, one of the fall-outs of market economy is the creation of individualism, fetishisization of money and commodification of relations. As a result, the individuals who have progressed on account of their individual hard work and independent thinking can turn out to be indifferent to the community's needs and neglect the community's values of sharing and serving. In such situations, some of the folk religious practices such as possession of gods/ goddesses becomes effective means to question those individuals and remind them of their sense of belonging to the community and their failure to adhere to the values of community. The common folk can make use of these practices to remind the upstart individuals of their duties and responsibilities towards others in the community. The shaman or the medium through which god acts would give stern warnings and suggest corrective measures or prevail upon them to share what they have with others. For instance Jefffry G Snodgrass[19] has made a very interesting study on the low-status Bhats in Rajastan in which he shows how one of its members, Bedami gets possessed many a times and acts as a medium of her husband's lineage goddess, Chavanda Mata. Ramu has entered the new market economy in a manner unlike other Bhats—as a paid employee at a local folklore institute. This job seems to regulates his life and values in ways that other new Bhat pursuits do not. Ramu's pursuit of a regular wage, personal savings, and even life insurance has made him to distance himself from his community members. As a result, he has failed to partake in Bhat's core community values of sharing, co-operation and loyalty. Hence his lineage goddess through the medium of his wife rebukes him for his attitude of destructive stinginess and forgetfulness towards his community and convinces Ramu to

spend on the community, thus "fixing his mind" and "teaching him how to behave."

Though Snodgrass' data calls for multiple narratives/analysis to understand this ambiguous and ambivalent relationship between the market economy and the vulnerable groups, it does throw light on the role of folk religious practice in constructing a discourse of contestation with the market economy when the latter tends to generate values of individualism, greed etc.. that goes against the traditional values of vulnerable groups such as sharing, solidarity and loyalty.

6. Marginality, Honour and Change of Religion

If the common understanding of development means improvement of the human life, for the vulnerable people this development is necessarily inclusive of their social existence as well and compellingly implies emancipation from the situation of marginality. That is why the Dalits in their developmental efforts seek for the removal of their social inequality and restoration of human dignity. This understanding would not only explain why there exists so much of 'politics of honour,' among the rural folk -especially among the vulnerable groups, but also provide a crucial key to the understanding of conversion stories among the vulnerable groups. The 'politics of honour,' prevalent among the mariginal people is basically an outcome of people's perceived threat to their vulnerable human dignity. Diana Mines' study on the village of Yanaimangalam,[20] Lamb's work on Ramnamis[21] and David Hardiaman's work on the Devi movement[22] are good examples of how religious resources are tapped by the vulnerable groups for the 'politics of honour' to restore their human dignity and exercise their agency.

Further, as Mosse[23] and others have noted, the recent sociological studies done on conversions among the Dalits hold that the view that conversion had to do with "the rejection of social inferiority and the affirmation of positive social identity."[24] Thus conversion looked at from the view-point of converts themselves

obtains a different meaning. Their motivations and objectives to subject themselves to the project of conversion was very different from those of the missionaries and other agencies. For the vulnerable groups, conversion actually meant a better mundane life and a new socio-cultural situation than a promise of an eternal heaven. It should be also noted that while new religious identity was largerly seen as a mark of independence and upward social mobility, it also true that the new religion did fail the marginal groups by providing newer contexts for the reproduction of caste inequality and discrimination.[25]

7. Folk Religion as an Interface between Development and Ecology

"Earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. If men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves. This we know: The Earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites only family,"[26] answered the native American Chief Seattle, in 1854, to the American President who had asked him to sell him some land. It was a strange question to put to a Red man for whom the earth was sacred beyond buying or selling. The words of the native American represent very powerfullly the mindset of the local and indigenous peoples across the nations with regard to their inalienable relationship with the mother earth. With the fast spreading process of globalization of capitalist economics in the late twentieth century, the vulnerable native peoples have come under intense pressures to open their lands for resource-exploitation. However, indigenous peoples have alternative development models that value the land and nature very differently from the capitalist sustainability models[27]. They embody alternative models of sustainable life, even though the natives use those lands and living beings for food, habitat, and trade. Such alternative models of sustainability are most boldly demonstrated in their symbolic and religious realm. Besides, they also appropriate the religious realm for the confrontation with outside forces and contestation of their powers. The emergence

of phenomena such as the "Cargo Cults" of the Pacific region, the "Ghost Dance" of the North American plains or the "Mau-Mau" uprisings of East Asia, and the Devi movement in North India are all social movements which manifest strong religious expressions whose inner dynamics are connected deeply to the local ecology. John Grim's volume[28] takes note of the small-scale native communities who, on the one hand, manage acceptable forms of modernization through the insights of elders and the revelations of dreamers and visionaries, and on the other hand also mount resistance to development schemes in which they have no voice. An emerging school of thought, knows as political ecology,[29] has as its focus of study the efforts to subvert indigenous cultures by the development agendas. The perspective is much more receptive to considering indigenous religions and other cultural knowledge systems as contributing more to production than earlier Marxist-oriented political economy analysis conceded.[30] The focus here is on the imaginative act (closely connected to indigenous /folk religions), which is present in indigenous societies, whereby local environments become central to people's identity. Richard Peet and Michael Watts[31] call this imaginative act as "environmental imaginary," which means a way of *imaging* nature, including visions of those forms of social and individual practice which are ethically proper and morally right with regard to a particular natural environment. Environmental imaginaries are usually expressed in abstract, mystical, and spiritual lexicons, and typically developed through regional discursive formations. It is to be noted that environmental imageries enable the vulnerable indigenous groups to review and contest specific processes of developments including the political and economic agendas of different developmental projects that affect the local ecology.

In fact, the folk religious world-view of the vulnerable groups are more holistic than the technology- centered modern scientific outlook. They are based on the age-old wisdom of the indigenous people, the vulnerable Adivasis and the Dalits that realized long ago that the care of the human is intrinsically related to the care of nature. The actualisation of the human cannot take place in

isolation or in the abstract. It has to take place in the concrete material world and along with the other creatures and beings in the world. This implies that, during the process of transformation of the humans, the human beings have to work for the promotion of well-being for the whole of the cosmos. While such a task calls for a proactive involvement of the humans in the world, it implies a total rejection of any dichotomy between matter and spirit, sacred and profane. This entails a holistic view of the universe which underscores a fundamental unity between the humans and the cosmos. This basic unity and the symbiotic relationship between the humans and the cosmos is best inscribed, created and established in the embodied human beings through concrete human practices. Such human practices obtain religious overtones in most of the cultures of the vulerable people for whom the sacred character of nature is commemorated and reproduced through folk religious rituals. For instance, Madhu Kanna[32] holds that the folk festival of *navapatrika* worship can be related to the issues of ecological sensibility. Similarly the various folk festivals such as *karam* in the tribal belt of Chotanagpur, *kodai* in South India and various season-transition festivals in different parts of India are at once the expressions of the religious and the ecological concerns of the vulnerable rural folk. Even other folk religious rituals such as *Bihu* in Assam or *Pongal* in Tamilnadu play a major role in making humans realise the inalienable relationship between nature and humans. More often than not, religious beliefs/practices and the earth's ecology are inextricably linked, and organically related. "Religious beliefs—especially those concerning the nature of powers that create and animate—become an effective part of ecological systems."[33] Rather than the major religious traditions, it is the folk/indigenous religious traditions which ensure the creation and the maintenance of the human being's intrinsic relationship with the natural environment.

Conclusion

In this article article, we have seen that religion continues to be an enduring tribute to humankind's infinite resourcefulness

and adaptability[34] in coping with the changes and problems that humanity faces in its onward journey towards new horizons. There was a time in the nineteenth century when the thinkers (sold to "secularisation theory") saw in religion an archaic mode of thought and action that would one day recede under the force of the modern institutions of science, law, politics, and education. However, what we witness in the 21st century is just the opposite. There is not only a proliferation of religious activities in different parts of the world in different forms and intensities, but a percolation of the religious into virtually every quarter of the human sphere. The continuation of religion in its old forms and the emergence of it in new avatars make us look for its relevance and meaning as appropriated by its local social actors. In this essay, we have attempted to interpret and analyze how the vulnerable groups such as Adivasis and other low-castes make religion as an interface to deal with issues that arise between their collective inter-subjectivity and the outer world which under the spell of modernization and transformation that threatens not only their stability but also that of the cosmos. Further, in folk religion the vulnerable groups could also sometime find an alternative space to interrogate the state bureaucracy's discriminatory approaches in the implementation of government's welfare schemes for their neighborhood and to contest the discriminatory caste system and its principles of its inequality, thereby upholding their human dignity and promoting their social progress . Thus the paper has taken issues with Max Weber's view that Indian religions obstruct change and development and has proved him wrong by showing that folk religions are pro-transformative, innovative, vibrant, performative, always ready to respond and adjust to the signs of the time.

Notes

1. Ananta Kumar Giri, *New Horizons of Social Theory*, Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2006. p.200.
2. Cf. Wiebe Nauta, "A Moral Critique of Fieldwork," in Ananta Kumar Giri et al.(eds.,)*The Development of Religion and the Religion of Development*, CW Delft: Eburon Delft, 2004. Pp.89-100, p. 90.

3. Cf. Rudiger Kroff & Heiko Schrader, "Does the End of Development Revitalise History?" in Ananta Kumar Giri et al. *The Development of Religion and the Religion of Development,* 9-17, p.12.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, p.14.
6. Cf. John Mohan Razu, "Introduction," *Bangalore Theological Forum,* 3&4 (30), 1998, A Special Issue on Development. pp 2-6.
7. Cf. Bas de Gaay Forman, "In Search for a New Paradigm" in Ananta Kumar Giri et al. *The Development of Religion and the Religion of Development,* pp. 18-28.
8. Cf. Ananta Kumar Giri, *New Horizons of Social Theory,* pp.199-222.
9. Cf. Oddie, G.A., ed., *Religion in South Asia: Religious Conversion and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern Times,* London: Curzon Press, 1977, and Duncan Forrester, *Caste and Christianity: Attitudes and Policies on Caste of Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions in India,* New Jersey: Curzon Press, 1980.
10. Cf. Chad M. Bauman, *Christian Identity and Dalit Religion in Hindu India, 1868-1947, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K:* William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company Grand Rapids, 2008. The works of Jose Maliekal and Anthony Sebastin are PhD theses done in University of Madras at the Department of Christian Studies.
11. Cf. Aparna Rayaprol, "Can You Talk Indian? Shifting Notions of Community and Identity in the Indian Diaspora," in Surinder S.Jodhka, *Community and Identities,* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001, pp. 163-190.
12. Cf. Max Weber, *The Religion of India,* trans. H. Gerth & D. Martindale, Free Press, New York, 1958. The studies that analysed these questions further are: Kapp, *Hindu Culture, Economic Development and Economic Planning in India,* Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1963 and Mishra, *Hinduism and Economic Growth,* Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1962.
13. Cf. Wiebe Nauta, "A Moral Critique of Fieldwork," in Ananta Kumar Giri et al. *The Development of Religion and the Religion of Development,* 89-100, p. 91.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Quarles van Ufford, Ph. and Ananta Kumar Giri, "Development as a shared responsibility: Ethics, aesthetics and a creative shaping of hu-

man possibilities" in Ufford and Giri (eds), *A Moral Critique of development,* Routledge, 2003.

16. Cf. Ananta Kumar Giri, *New Horizons of Social Theory*, p.200.
17. ne might wonder if Hinduism has an other-centered ethics. The concepts of *daya, dana, seva* and *lokasangraha* in Hinduism show have the other as a reference point for the pursuit of one's *dharma.* The total welfare of all *(lokasangraha)* is integral to one's liberation. For instance Gita says, "Lokasangraham evapi sampasyan kartum arhasi (3:20)." It means one's action, which leads to salvation, has to be for *lokasangraha.* The first verse of *Isa Upanishad* states, "Behold everything in the form of God". This 'advaitic' statement underlies the fact of the fundamental unity of all beings, and should create a deep respect for all forms of life and cultivate a sense of equality among all beings. Later *visistadvaita* philosophy and other bhakti schools of Vedanta viewed the whole world and the human beings either as different parts or as different aspects of one God. This indicates how the concept of the 'other' understood as a reality outside one's self is regarded *metaphysically* sacred in Hindu tradition.
18. Cf. Diane P. Mines "Hindu Nationalism, Untouchable Reform, and the Ritual Production of a South Indian Village," *American Ethnologist* 29/1 (February 2002), 58-85, p.70.
19. Jeffrey G. Snodgrass, "A Tale of Goddesses, Money, and Other Terribly Wonderful Things: Spirit Possession, Commodity Fetishism, and the Narrative of Capitalism in Rajasthan, India," *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Aug., 2002), pp. 602-636.
20. Diana P. Mines, Fierce Gods: Inequality, Ritual and the Politics of Dignity in a South Indian Village Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2005. 21Ramdas Lamb, *Rapt in the Name: The Ramnamis, Ramnam, and Untouchable Religion in Central India.* Albany: State University of New York, 2002.
22. David Hardiman, *The Coming of Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India,* Delhi: Oxford Univesity Press, 1987.
23. David Mosse, "Catholic Church and Dalit Christian Activism in Contemporary Tamilnadu" in *Margins of Faith*, edited by Rowena Robinson and Marianus Kujur, Delhi: Sage, 2010, 235-64.
24. Ibid., 236.
25. bid., 235.

26. Siddartha, "Earth Spiritualty-a New Eco-social Paradigm" in John Clammer (ed.), *Socially Engaged Religions*, Bangalore: Books For Change, 2010, 41-49, p. 42.

27. Joan, Martinez-Alier, *Environmentalism of the Poor,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.

28. ohn A. Grim, (ed.) *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology* pp. xxxviii-xxxix. Cambridge: Center for the Study of World Religions, 2001.

29. The Anthropologist Eric Wolf introduced the expression, 'political ecology' in 1972. Both anthrogplogists and geographers have shown interest in this filed, which is growing in the contemporary world. Several journals started by activists carry the title 'Political Ecology' in Germany, Mexico, France, Austria, Italy and in other countries since the 1980s and early 1990s. See Martinez-Alier, *Environmentalism of the Poor,* page 71.

30. Grim, *Indigenous Traditions,* xl.

31. Richard Peet, & Michael Watts, *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements* London and New York: Routledge, 1996, 263.

32. Madhu Kanna, "The Ritual Capsule of Durga Puja: An Ecological Perspective," in Christopher Key Chapple et al. (eds.,) *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky, and Water,* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001. 33Sullivan, "Preface" to John A. Grim ed., *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology, Centre for the Study of World Religions*, Harvard University School, Massachusetts, Cambridge, 2001, p.xi.

34. Raymond T. Firth, *Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 214.