

THE ADIVASI QUESTION: ISSUES OF LAND, FOREST AND LIVELIHOOD, Edited by Indra Munshi. Orient Blackwan Private Limited and Economic and Political Weekly, New Delhi, pages 408, 2012

This book is a significant compilation of 25 articles, deriving from *Economic and Political Weekly* of the past five decades, dealing with the vital issues of the Adivasis/tribals in India. The book is well organized into seven sections, and each section contains several articles on the basis of issues dealt with.

The author Indra Munshi opens the book with a detailed and insightful description about the tribal deprivation in India. The elaborative process is well supported by many sociological thoughts.

Section one, “Regulation and Resistance, Adivasi communities in the colonial context”, deals with the origin of the tribal resistance movements in India. Looking at the issue from the historical perspective, Ram Chandra Guha in his article “Forestry in British and post-British India: A historical Analysis” outlines the inception of the tribal resistance movement dating back to the enactment of colonial laws in India which

deracinate the Adivasis from their customary right of access to land. Discussing the policy management systems, starting from the colonial period to post-colonial period, Guha argues that the post-colonial legislation was unjustifiable because of its commercial and industrial interests. Articles “State Simplification” by Sanjeev Kumar on Garo protests of late nineteenth and eighteenth century in Assam and the study of Ashok K Upadhyia on “Peasantisation of Adivasis in Thane District” support Guha’s arguments that the extreme situation of exploitation and coercion are the reasons for the birth of resistance movements of tribals from time to time.

With a compilation of five valuable articles on the aspects of tribal land alienation, Section two of the book is titled “Loss of land, Loss of nerve”. B. B Mohanty’s article “Land Distribution among Scheduled Castes and Tribes” concludes that the land distribution system over the years failed to bring any substantial improvement in the living conditions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India. Case studies and other relevant articles in the section are found to be supportive of Mohanty’s findings. E Selvarajan, in his article “Alienation of Tribal land in Tamil Nadu, panel data analysis” shows the extent of transfer of tribal land to non-tribals in Tamil Nadu. Land mortgage is found to be a predominant form of tribal land alienation and this is reflected in Nitya Rao’s study on “Displacement from Land: Case of Santhal Parganas”. From land reform legislation perspectives, Brian Lobo’s article “Land Reforms: Turning the Clock Back’, briefs about the implementation of the Maharashtra Private Forests (Acquisition) Act 1975 and how the Act has resulted in the increase of number of tenants and the landless labourers in Maharashtra. K. Balgopal’s article “Illegal Acquisition in Tribal Areas” looks at the issue in the Andhra Pradesh context and verifies that illegal acquisition has taken place due to judicial apathy, bureaucratic connivance and governmental inaction.

The subject matter of Section three, “Forest Degradation and Forest Communities”, is a combination of three articles. Capturing the trajectory of change in the livelihood patterns of Birhors community of Jharkhand, Sohail Fridoe in “Forest Degradation, Changing Workforce Structure and Population Redistribution” argues that the massive degradation of forest resources forced the community to disperse over several districts in search of alternative livelihood which gives a wrong impression that their population is diminishing. Pankaj Sekharia’s article “Deforestation

in Andaman and Nicobar: Its Impact on Onge” shows how the clearing of land for settlement and the loss of forest to logging have adversely affected the community. Studying the issue from the gender perspective, DN in his article “Women and Forest” places the discussion on the role of women in forest economy and in protecting forest. He argues that due to the influence of patriarchal mindset, women are deprived of “holistic and ecological” knowledge of the processes of nature, and women are not allowed to manage the forest at the village level.

Three articles related to conservation and community rights are taken up in Section four titled “Conservation Vs Community Rights”. Judy Whitehead in her article “Repopulating the Landscape: Space against Place in Narmada Valley” describes the affirmative steps taken by Tadavi and Vasava ethnic groups of Rajpipla by reconstructing their environmental and social history as a way of asserting their sense of place, as belonging, as opposed to the abstract idea of space used by the administrators and planners. Viewing differently the ‘human-animal conflicts’, Sagari R. Ram Das’s article “Gajah and Praja: Conservation, Control and Conflicts” talks about how the Adivasis living in and around a wildlife sanctuary of the Lakhari Valley have asserted their rights to restore the forest by creating a friendly environment for animal and human survival by using the Forest Right Act. Giving the idea to resolve people-sanctuary conflict, Neela Mukherjee in her article “Resolving People Sanctuary Conflict in Protected Areas” has emphasized on how the joint management system of the villagers and forest staff could help to regenerate forest as well as enhancing the livelihoods of the villagers.

Section five entitled “Displacement and Rehabilitation: Role of the State”, deals with the issues related to displacement and resettlement. Describing the displacement issue in Jharkhand, the article by Mathew Areeparampil “Displacement due to Mining in Jharkhand” argues that the issues of displacement needs to be looked at from the wider perspective of ‘dispossession’ which results in enormous problems in the lives of tribals and often justifies the capitalist interest. How relocation impacts the livelihoods of the affected community is well shown in Asmita Kabra’s paper on “Displacement and Rehabilitation of an Adivasi Settlement: Case of Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary, Madhya Pradesh”. Drawing from three independent reviews, Renu Modi shows in her article “Sardar Sarovar Oustees” that dislocation has brought many negative impacts on the livelihoods of Bhil community.

Keeping the Forest Right Act (FRA) as the central theme of discussion, Section six of the book titled “Forest Rights Act: A step forward” articulates various provisions, implications and issues in terms of implementation and non-implementation of the Act. Indra Munshi and Mahesh Rangarajan’s articles “Scheduled Tribes Bill, 2005” and “Fire in the Forest” hover around the provisions of the Act relating to the question of tribal rights and forest protection. Arguing in favour of the bill, Indra Munshi reiterates that the bill is necessary for the protection of the rights and livelihood of the Adivasis along with forest conservation, through empowerment of local institutions. Narrating the problems in implementation of the Forest Right Act, M. Gopinath Reddy and others in their article titled, “Issues Related to Implementation of the Forest rights Act in Andhra Pradesh”, talk about the lack of coordination and transparency at different levels, and the monopoly role-play of the revenue and forest department officials in the implementation of the Act. From the field study “Implementation of the Forest Rights Act in the Western Ghats Region of Kerala”, Jyothis Sathyupalan accentuates the lack of coordination between the various government departments leading to the bad implementation of the Act.

Section seven needs to be read in the backdrop of “Resource management by whom and for whom”, a compilation of three articles. Dev Nathan and Govind Kelkar in their article “Civilizational Change: Market and privatization among Indigenous peoples” discuss how the growth of the market and privatization have changed the old production system among the indigenous communities from the mode of consumption to profit that leads to growing control of men on economic affairs. The author coins it as “civilizational transformation”. Looking at the issues in the context of Adivasi rights, Amita Baviskar in her article “Fate of the Forest” argues that the continuous denial of Adivasi right to access the forest has resulted in ongoing conflicts. She considers this as the biggest obstacle to forest conservation. Taking up a success story of joint forest management, Emmanuel D’ Silva’s article “Behroonguda” documents the efforts of tribal communities who formed themselves into a forest protection community, which not only regenerates the forest, but also increases the financial value and creates employment opportunities for the local people.

To sum up, the book is a good read for academicians, students, researchers and activists who take an interest in Adivasi issues.

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