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# The Uprooted People of the Land: An Ethical/ Theological Reflection on the Protection of Adivasi Land and Human Dignity in the “New and Shining India”

Ashok Kujur

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**The Uprooted People of the Land:  
An Ethical/Theological Reflection on the Protection of Adivasi  
Land and Human Dignity in the “New and Shining India”**

A thesis by

**Ashok Kujur**

Presented to

The Faculty of the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Licentiate in Sacred Theology

Berkeley, California

May 2017

Committee signatures

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## ABSTRACT

### **The Uprooted People of the Land: An Ethical/Theological Reflection on the Protection of Adivasi Land and Human Dignity in the “New and Shining India”**

**Ashok Kujur, S.J.**

The uprooting of Adivasis from their land raises theological, anthropological, and ethical questions regarding the intrinsic dignity of Adivasis as human persons, created in the image of God. This thesis argues that the looting of Adivasi land on the part of the multinational corporations (MNCs) is an unethical and sinful reality. It proposes a paradigm of prophetic dialogue and critical pedagogy that joins the effort to conscientize Adivasis about their own oppression, the power of the political dynamics, and to empower them in their struggle for freedom and liberation.

In this project I analyze and critique the issue of displacement caused by neo-liberalism, economic growth and unjust societal structures through the lens of a rights-based ethics, which advocates the protection of the rights of Adivasis and other vulnerable people who cry out for rootedness in their land. This study is located within the broader area of Christian theological ethics, with a particular focus on the issue of land rights of Adivasis, whose survival and way of life are being severely threatened by the mass development projects of the MNCs in India today.

The fundamental question this thesis explores is how best to address the injustice of the uprooting of Adivasis from their ancestral lands. The study first analyzes the current anthropological, socio-cultural, political, and spiritual reality of Adivasi uprootedness and suffering in light of the historical background of land grab and alienation in India. Second, through the lens of a rights-based ethics, the study looks at the issue of Adivasi displacement and alienation induced by the MNCs. Third, it considers how land can be a ground or revelatory text to assess the theological, moral, economic, anthropological, and ecological significance of human dignity, drawing resources from the natural law theory of Thomas Aquinas and key papal encyclicals to show how human dignity has been the first principle of social justice. I treat this issue by employing a deontological approach and a social inter-connection model to forge a constructive proposal which exerts a moral claim on the Brahmin culture and the MNCs. Here, my effort is to include every Indian citizen, urging them to say no to any kind of development that is not humanizing and yes to those projects which protect bio-diversity, promote bio-centrism and enshrine eco-egalitarian culture. Finally, it discusses the problem of the caste system and critiques the collusion of the Brahmin class and the MNCs, which amplifies the land grab from Adivasis, threatening their survival and way of life.

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May they all be rooted in God's love!

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

***Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*** (Genesis 3:19).

We hear these words from the priests and Church ministers every time we attend liturgy on Ash Wednesday. This sacred text from the Hebrew Bible reminds us that we are made up of clay—soil. It also reminds us of our source and starting point—that we have emanated from *adamah*—the living soil; and one day we shall all return to that *adamah*. This calls to mind that human beings are earth creatures who are called to “till and keep” the land.<sup>1</sup> The terms, “tilling and keeping” literally mean to care for and preserve the land (Gen. 2:15). The span of life and death for human beings is entirely grounded in the soil and land. Therefore, humans, by their origins, are called to be the cultivators, soil guardians, and earth custodians.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, our age is characterized by many issues which disrupt our relationship with the earth. I have seen cases in my village where brothers have fought among themselves and killed one another in order to claim a larger piece of their father’s

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*, Encyclical Letter on care for our common home (Rome: The World among us Press, 2015), 40. The hermeneutics of “tilling and Keeping” in the light of the protection of land becomes a reminder that the model of development presented by the MNCs is entirely different from a sustainable and renewable model of development advocated by the Pope Francis. Here “tilling” refers to cultivating, ploughing or working while “keeping” means caring, protecting. Overseeing and preserving. There is a relationship of mutual responsibilities between human beings and cosmos. If we fail to “till” and “keep” the land, the Bible tells us that life itself would be in danger.

<sup>2</sup> Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 160-165; Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love Ecological as Ecological Vocation* (Augsburg: Fortress Publishers, 2013), 197-199. We are earth creatures. In the words of a second century theologian Irenaeus of Lyons, we are “mud creatures,” in Hebrew *haadam*—crafted from *adamah* (dust of the earth, topsoil). Humans are made from humus that is we are made of very elements that existed with big bang some 13.7 billion years ago. We are not above and outside of nature. We are of the animal kingdom, the phylum Chordata, the genus *homo* and the species *homo sapiens*. As mud creatures, our God-given task is in relationship to rest of the nature. It is to re-see and re-situate ourselves within rather than above earth’s web of life.



lands.<sup>3</sup> I have seen many families broken due to issues related to land distribution. I have witnessed many court cases concerning land equitability in which people's cases were never resolved. I know many families who have lost loved ones while resisting the grabbing of their land by multi-national corporations (MNCs). There are many untold sad stories behind the land. From my research and experience, I can say that the land problem is going to threaten the survival of not only humankind, but also of entire eco-systems on this planet. Moreover, our age is further characterized by the fear that these problems may now be insoluble and that no one will be able to stop our headlong plunge into the destruction of the planet.<sup>4</sup>

### **1. Reasons for the Research**

From ancient times, land has had social, political, economic, and religious significance, particularly for indigenous peoples. For the *Adivasis* of central and northern India, land is a gift from God and life itself. Land is heritage and not a property. Therefore, the inheritance of land insures the survival, continuity and flourishing of the Adivasi community. The possession of land also manifests the community's life with God. The uprooting of Adivasis from their land on the part of the extraction industries in the name of development is an unethical and sinful reality. Such dislocation causes unemployment, poverty, homelessness, psychological stress, and a rise in crime. People are uprooted from their faith, culture, and the tradition of their ancestors. Relations are broken and people become violent against the powerful and dominant elites of society. Such uprooting also breeds violence and religious intolerance.

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<sup>3</sup> There has always been a human tendency throughout human history beginning from Cain's killing of Abel in the book of Genesis and may be present until humanity's end. It is also a feature of the near destruction of the earth by humans in the book of Revelation.

<sup>4</sup> Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001),7.

It is estimated that there are more than 370 million indigenous people spread across 70 countries worldwide. They retain their unique social, cultural, economic and political systems in their lands. The term “indigenous” has prevailed as a generic term for many years. In some countries there may be a preference for other terms like “Adivasi,” “tribal,” “first peoples/nations,” “aboriginals,” “ethnic groups,” and so forth. The 67.7 million people belonging to ‘Scheduled Tribes’ in India are generally considered to be “Adivasis,” literally meaning “indigenous people” or “original inhabitants.”<sup>5</sup> “Scheduled tribes” is also an administrative term used for purposes of administering certain specific constitutional privileges, protections and benefits for specific segments of the population who are considered historically disadvantaged and “backward.”

According to the census of India, 2011, more Adivasis live in India than in any other country in the world. Adivasis are especially concentrated in a belt that stretches across central India from Rajasthan and Gujarat in the west to West Bengal and Orissa in the east as well as in several states in the central and northeastern parts. The total Indian population is around 1.3 billion, in which more than 8% (roughly 97,000,000) of that population is Adivasi.

The ideology and attitude of the present Indian government towards indigenous land is pro-economic growth and highly radicalized. Currently, India is governed by the *Bharatiya Janata Party*, popularly known as the BJP, which is influenced by the extreme Hindu radicals who use violence as weapons to achieve their goals. The party is led by Narendra Modi, who is a cradle Hindu fanatic. He has openly declared as his mission and political agenda that his government would be committed to make India a Hindu nation

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<sup>5</sup> Hrangthan Chhungi, *Hearing the Voices of Tribal and Adivasis* (New Delhi: Cambridge Press, 2014), 3-83.

by 2020. He has signed hundreds of Memoranda of Understandings (MoUs) and welcomed many multi-national companies (MNCs) to establish their corporations in India. His recent slogans, “the New India,” “Modern India,” and “make it in India,” have attracted many international corporations to set up their hubs in indigenous states such as Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Jharkhand, among other northeastern states.<sup>6</sup> The agricultural lands of indigenous peoples are being acquired by the central government and sold to the multi-national corporations (MNCs). The agricultural lands, which have produced food, milk and honey, are poisoned by chemicals. This has caused Adivasis to move to the cities in search of work and find shelter in the slums, radically disrupting their entire way of life.

Economically and socially, Adivasis constitute the poorest strata of Indian society. They have suffered disproportionately from the adverse effects of developmental projects, climate change, social exclusion, human trafficking and many other forms of exploitation. Their traditional way of life has also been disrupted by the insurgency and the present political agenda of the current ruling party (BJP) against minorities. Their churches and places of worship have been burnt and vandalized by extremist fundamentalist groups. The lands of the Adivasis, on which their spiritualities and religious values have flourished, are being desecrated by such anti-Christian elements. At the same time, indigenous people in India are resisting the rapacious development projects that are seizing their lands and vitiating their way of life and survival.

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<sup>6</sup> Kanishka Chowdhury, *The New India: Citizenship, Subjectivity, and Economic Liberalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 5-58. The term “the New India” refers to a fundamental ideological project of India promoted by the extreme political leaders, such as *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP). In this case, the term also connotes a notion of culture as a site for class coalitions, assertions of hegemony and historical reshaping of the class and ethnicity. The fundamental political leaders understand culture as commodity (materiality of culture).

This thesis will argue that the lives and the cry of the suffering indigenous peoples is the cry of the land for justice and equity. The cry of vulnerable Adivasis is the cry of God's very self, who demands hospitality and a faithful account of our Christian discipleship. A response of violence to the cry of vulnerable Adivasis only makes our human nature more evil and sinful. Violence and idolatrous political interests distort the image of God and betray the rights and human dignity of Adivasis. The protection of land from extraction companies and industrialization is the protection of humanity and our faith.

## **2. Scope and Nature of Study**

The looting of Adivasi land, particularly in the central and northern part of India, raises theological, anthropological, and ethical questions regarding the intrinsic dignity of the Adivasis as human persons, created in the image of God; though the dominant Hindu majority does not see this as a problem. Rather, the present political leaders ignore the “development-induced mass displacement” of Adivasis.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the emerging voices, the oral traditions, protests against MNCs and agony of uprootedness of the Adivasis become a theological narrative. I write this thesis as a victim of the uprootedness which is induced by MNCs and other developmental projects that have constantly ignored the Adivasis presence and their cultural values particularly in the central India.

In this project, I analyze and critique the issue of displacement caused by neo-liberalism, economic growth and unjust societal structures through the lens of a rights-

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<sup>7</sup> Dev Nathan and Virginius Xaxa, *Social Exclusion and Adverse Inclusion: Development and Deprivation of Adivasis in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 55. In the name of development, the indigenous peoples are forcibly displaced from their cultivating lands by the corporate sectors. The multi-national companies are being established in the farming lands, which are rich in coal-mines, minerals and oil industries. In many cases the farmers are not compensated for their lands at all. Resettlement, re-compensation and relocation have been some of the common catastrophes of the land alienation.

based ethics, which advocates the protection of the rights of Adivasis and other vulnerable people who cry out for rootedness in their land. This study is located within the broader area of Christian theological ethics, with a particular focus on the issue of land rights of Adivasis, whose survival and way of life are being severely threatened by the mass development projects of the multinational corporations in India today.

The central problem of this issue of Adivasi displacement is not merely emancipation or dislocation of Adivasis, but *rootage and accommodation*. It is not only about making meaning of their historical events and stories, i.e., *belonging*. It is not only about separation from the broader community, but about the placement and *location* of their own tribal society in the face of massive displacement. In the biblical terminology of Walter Brueggemann, it is not about isolation, but about the ability to transfer the land from one generation to the next—about *placement* between the generations of promises.<sup>8</sup>

The fundamental question this thesis seeks to address is how best to address the injustice of the uprooting of Adivasis from their ancestral lands. The thesis proposes a paradigm of prophetic dialogue among Adivasis, other Christians, and Hindus, as well as a critical pedagogy that joins the effort to conscientize Adivasis about their own oppression and empowers them in their struggle for freedom and liberation.

The study first analyzes the current anthropological, socio-cultural, political, and spiritual reality of Adivasi uprootedness and suffering in light of the historical background of land grab and alienation in India. Second, through the lens of a rights-based ethics, the study looks at the issue of Adivasi displacement and alienation induced by the MNCs. Third, it considers how land can be a ground or revelatory text to assess

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 201.

the theological, moral, economic, anthropological and ecological significance of human dignity, drawing resources from the natural law theory of Thomas Aquinas and key papal encyclicals to show how human dignity has been the first principle of social justice. Finally, it discusses the problem of the caste system and critiques the collusion of the Brahmin class and the MNCs, which amplifies the land grab from Adivasis, threatening their survival and way of life.

### **3. Thesis Statement**

The uprooting of Adivasis from their land raises theological, anthropological, and ethical questions regarding the intrinsic dignity of Adivasis as human persons, created in the image of God. This thesis argues that the looting of Adivasi land on the part of the multi-national corporations is an unethical and sinful reality, and proposes a paradigm of prophetic dialogue and critical pedagogy that joins the effort to conscientize Adivasis about their own oppression, and empowers them in their struggle for freedom and liberation.

### **4. Methodology**

In this project, I analyze and critique the issues of the uprootedness and displacement of Adivasis caused by the MNCs, neo-liberal economic growth, and unjust societal structures through the lens of a rights-based ethics. This approach seeks to safeguard and protect the human dignity and rights of Adivasis, who cry out for rootedness in their land. I shall undertake this critique by employing Amartya Sen's unique method utilized in his book *Poverty and Famine: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, which studied the problems of poverty and famine in West Bengal in 1943.

Sen's methodology involves three components: firstly, *the description of the reality* of the famine problem; secondly, *the analysis* of the famine problem; and thirdly, *a critical evaluation* of the problem. Sen's method provides us with a vantage point to delve into the reality of Adivasi life—their untold stories of displacement and suffering, as well as their rich cultural diversity and bio-centric spirituality, which are being eclipsed by the current model of development.

According to this methodology, the chapters unfold as follows. In Chapter One, I will *describe* the historical reality of Adivasi uprootedness and suffering in light of the historical background of land grab and alienation in India. Through the lens of a rights-based ethics, which I will employ to advocate for the protection of the rights of Adivasis, Chapters Two and Three *analyze* the issue of the displacement of Adivasis induced by the MNCs. For this, I will employ Thomas Aquinas' exposition of natural law and his cosmic teleological vision to explain how the concept of human dignity can be extended to encompass the environment in which human beings live—in this case, the ancestral lands of the Adivasi, or indigenous peoples, of India. In Chapter Four, I will *evaluate* the problem of caste system and critique the collusion of the Brahmin class and the MNCs, which amplifies the grabbing and destruction of Adivasi land.

In addition to Sen's method, I will draw critical insights from Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*, Willis Jenkins' model of prophetic pragmatism, and Aseem Shrivastava and Ashish Kothari's concept of Radical Ecological Democracy. I will also employ the narratives of international, national, and local social activists and scholars who are working to empower Adivasis to retain their land and way of life.

## **5. Significance of the Work**

The plight of Adivasis, who are oppressed due to decades of displacement from the land, has become a new theological and ethical narrative. The land problem becomes a revelatory text, showing us how theologians and religious ethicists can address this crucial problem in order to bring about the salvation and liberation of both the oppressed Adivasis and their oppressors, the dominant Hindu society. The protection of land from industrialization and MNCs becomes significant because for Adivasis, land is a place that has meaning because of the history lodged there—because of the stories and events that have happened on their lands.

My prime focus in this research is the protection of the human dignity and rights of 85 million indigenous peoples, who by default happen to be the Adivasis who have or will lose their land and livelihoods because of the human-made catastrophe going under the name of “urban development.” This work will help political and religious leaders to create a synergy between the Western and Indian cultures to resist the development that violates the inherent rights of nature, species, and Adivasis. Thus, this work will open up vistas for dialogue and unmask the strategies of the dominant Hindutva party, which appears to seek the eradication of the Christian faith from India through (among other ways) the uprooting of Adivasis from their land. This constructive project will also show how a social-connection model of shared responsibility can become an eco-bio-centric process differing from an anthropocentric approach, protecting land, the environment, and oppressed peoples from degradation and death. If we follow these proposals, we can join our voices with Pope Francis and others who appeal for the need for a new culture, a



new path and new leadership models which are fueled by deep moral commitment, educational campaigns, marches, and civil disobedience.

My work breaks new ground in its integration of Latin American liberation theologies, European political theology, the biblical scholarship of Walter Brueggemann, and rights-based ethics to consider the spiritual, cultural, and sociological significance of rootedness in the land. In addition, it is novel in its analysis of the intersection of caste hegemony and ecological destruction.

**CHAPTER ONE**

**THE GRIM HISTORICAL REALITY OF THE UPROOTED ADIVASIS IN  
INDIA**

Historical critical method provides a vantage-point from which to interpret the current reality of the *Adivasis*. The problem of land alienation and land grab in India in the distant past, in which indigenous peoples struggled to protect their lands from landlords, provides an interpretive lens for understanding how the present-day dominance of multi-national companies threatens to swallow up Adivasi identity. Albert Nolan, quoting Edward Schillebeeckx, shows the importance of history in construing the present: “historical objectivity is not a reconstruction of the past in its unrepeatability, it is the truth of the past in the light of the present.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, historical narratives about the exploitation of and discrimination against indigenous peoples open up vistas of opportunities for research on current forms of Adivasi oppression and displacement. This chapter thus looks at the current historical reality of Adivasi uprootedness and suffering in light of the historical background of land grab and alienation in India. Part one focuses on who are the Adivasis? In part two, I discuss how land has become a ground of suffering for Adivasis. In part three, I analyze the historical background of the Adivasi land grab in India, and in part four, I explore the land as a double-hermeneutical prism to interpret Biblical Adivasi faith.

1. Who are the Adivasis?

**1.1 The Conceptual Understanding of the Term “Adivasi”**

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001),6.

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues notes that there is no official definition of “indigenous peoples.” The term “indigenous”<sup>2</sup> has prevailed as a generic term for many years. In some countries, there may be a preference for other terms such as “Adivasi,” “tribal,” “first peoples/nations,” “aboriginals,” “ethnic groups,” and so forth. The 67.7 million people belonging to ‘Scheduled Tribes’<sup>3</sup> in India are generally considered to be Adivasis, literally meaning ‘indigenous people’ or ‘original inhabitants.’<sup>4</sup> “Scheduled Tribes” (STs) is also an administrative term used for purposes of administering certain specific constitutional privileges, protections and benefits for specific segments of the population who are considered historically disadvantaged and “backward.” For the sake of clarity, I shall simply use the term “Adivasi” to indicate the indigenous peoples of India.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The indigenous peoples of India are called Adivasis. Etymologically, Adivasi is a compound Sanskrit word derived from “Adi”, which means “primordial or the beginning,” and “vasi” means “dweller.” Ironically, the Indian government refuses to accept that there are “indigenous peoples” in India and eschews both terms “Adivasi” and “indigenous.” See Shashibushan Karwar and Alex Ekka, *The Indian Census and Jharkhand Adivasi* (Ranchi: Jharkhand Navnirman, 2000) 5-7; Ram Dayal Munda and B.P Keshari, “Recent Developments in the Jharkhand Movement,” in Ram Dayal Munda and S. Bosu Mullick (eds.) *The Jharkhand Movement: Indigenous People’ Struggle for Autonomy in India* (Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affair, 2003), 216-231.

<sup>3</sup> The “Scheduled Tribes” (ST) is a political status conferred upon 697 tribes notified by the Central Government under Article 342 of the Indian Constitution with certain tribes being notified in more than one state. I use the terms ‘tribal(s)’ and ‘Adivasi(s)’ interchangeably, but I simply mean Adivasi(s). cf. <http://www.ncst.nic.in>. Accessed on February 3, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Hrangthan Chhungi, *Hearing the Voices of Tribal and Adivasis* (New Delhi: Cambridge Press, 2014), 3-83.

<sup>5</sup> Adivasis are the ancient and native people, with a distinct identity and culture that has territorial identification, a harmonious and symbiotic relationship with the earth as her children, internally organized on an egalitarian and communitarian basis, with systems of knowledge, self-governance and freedom. The criteria followed for specification of Adivasis in India are indications of distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, living in unreachable areas following traditional beliefs and practices, worshipping nature, backwardness, depending on forest resources, indigenous arts of dance and music, unique way of life.

The word “Adivasi” is often used for tribals who are living in the Chotanagpur area of India. In Sanskrit, *Adi* means original and *vasi* inhabitant. Agapit Tirkey notes that, “In the context of the Jharkhand movement, this word was consciously chosen by and for the tribals to convey and promote a sense of pride and self-respect.”<sup>6</sup> Adivasi societies have often been defined in contrast to non-Adivasi society (usually understood as Hindu society). According to G.S. Ghurye’s 1963 research on indigenous peoples, the Adivasis are understood by mainstream Hindu society as “backward Hindus.”<sup>7</sup> Such Hindu perspectives of Adivasi societies have to be rejected outright, and new perspectives adopted, because the Adivasis do not belong to Hindu society. Tirkey, a Jesuit anthropologist from Chotanagpur, as well as other Adivasi scholars, characterize the *Adivasi* groups generally based on these salient features.

1. “The clan and lineage are important structural units.
2. Land and forest constitute their main means of livelihood.
3. They foster communitarian living and decision-making.
4. Their village communities are relatively homogeneous and unstratified.

Though economic inequalities exist in them, these are of a totally different order than the inequalities present in villages with Brahmin, Rajput or Muslim landlords.

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<sup>6</sup> Agapit Tirkey, *Understanding Tribal Culture for more effective Education*, In Joseph Anikuzhikattil., et. al (eds.) (Shillong: DBCIC Publications, 2003), 35. Jharkhand Movement is an autonomy movement of midland India. The movement started in 20<sup>th</sup> century around 1915 in the region of Chotanagpur in the name of Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj (CNUS), where the burning issues pertaining to tribal identity, culture and political liberation in the context of Jharkhand were addressed.

<sup>7</sup> V.K. Mathur, “The Traditional-Modern Continuum: An Assumption in Tribal Development”, *Journal of Social Research*, 10 (2), 1967,11-25.

5. The Adivasis have been exploited in the past by ‘outside exploiters’ such as moneylenders, revenue farmers and landlords. The process is going on even in the post-Independence period.
6. Each Adivasi group speaks its own mother tongue, which is different from the major Indian languages. Some Adivasis have however lost their mother tongues under certain socio-political situations.”<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the most prominent values characterizing the life of Adivasi people are a basic sense of equality (egalitarianism); a spirit of cooperation; a keen sense of commonality regarding all that nature has freely given, especially *jal, jangal, jamin* (water, forest and land); a cherished process of community decision-making by consensus; and a closeness to and respect for nature and all that it contains. All these make the life of Adivasis human and humanizing.

### **1.2 Where are Adivasis Located?**

It is estimated that there are more than 370 million indigenous peoples spread across 70 countries worldwide. They retain their unique social, cultural, economic and political systems in their respective countries. Indian theologian Michael Amaladoss affirms that the Adivasis predate others, have their distinct religio-cultural, socio-political and racial identity, and fall outside the caste system.<sup>9</sup> According to the census of India, 2011, more Adivasis live in India than in any other country in the world. Adivasis are especially concentrated in a belt that stretches across central India from Rajasthan and

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<sup>8</sup> Tirkey, *Understanding Tribal Culture for More Effective Education*, 35-36.

<sup>9</sup> Leading anthropologists, sociologists and ethnographers include Sarat Chandra Roy, *Oraons and their Country* (Calcutta: Catholic Orphan Press, 1930); Joseph Troisi, *Tribal Religion* (Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1977); Ram Dayal Munda, *The Jharkhand Movement: Indigenous Peoples’ Struggle for Autonomy in India* (Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2003); Michael Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom: Liberation Theologies from Asia* (Marknoll: Orbis Books, 2014), 22-23.

Gujarat in the west to West Bengal and Orissa in the east as well as in several states in the central and the northeastern parts. The total Indian population is around 1.3 billion, of which more than 8% (roughly 97,000,000) of that population is *Adivasi*.

Adivasis are rural people. However, it is common now for them to move to cities temporarily in search of work. Economically and socially, Adivasis constitute the poorest strata of Indian society. They have suffered disproportionately from the adverse effects of developmental projects, climate change, social exclusion, human trafficking and many other forms of exploitation. Their traditional way of life also has been disrupted by the insurgence and the present political agendas of the current ruling party (BJP) against minorities. The churches and worshipping places of the Adivasis have been burnt and vandalized by extreme fundamentalist groups. The lands of the Adivasis, upon which their spiritualities and religious values have flourished, have been desecrated by such anti-Christian elements. There is a great need to protect our land and religions.

## **2. Land as Ground of Suffering**

### **2.1 Historical Problem**

Hebrew words for “land” used in the Hebrew Bible are “*eretz*” and “*adamah*,” which mean *land as country* and *land as earth*, respectively. The Exodus of Israel is all about the journey towards the Promised Land. From the time of the origins of the Hebrew people, possession of land has always been a struggle for identity, place, and security. In the twenty-first century, in the wake of the green revolution (in India and elsewhere), land has become a major concern and enterprise even for contemporary people.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 3-4.

For Israel, land was central to the shaping of their faith and sojourn in the wilderness. Similarly, the Christian faith of the Adivasis is rooted in their land. Therefore, land becomes a historical ground serving as an interpretive lens for the unique interconnection of land and faith, and the faith-journey of the uprooted people of the land.

The yearning to belong somewhere, to have a home, to be in a safe land, is a deep desire of indigenous groups across the world. Among the non-poor of society, loss of land or place can be seen in terms of sociological displacement or psychological dislocation. However, for contemporary Adivasi culture in the north-central part of India, the sense of being lost, displaced, discriminated against, or rendered homeless, is pervasive and deeply traumatizing. We have seen similar yearnings among the Native Americans of North America who have been struggling to defend their ancestral territories. Recently, we have witnessed thousands of protesters, including members of over 280 Native American nations, who have gathered to resist the United States Army Corps of Engineers at the Dakota Access Pipeline. The protests at Standing Rock are more than an environmental struggle; they are an attempt to assert indigenous sovereignty and landownership. This is a revolt against the erasure of an entire people and their sacred lands and customs. The issues of white dominance and of land ownership continue to remain as points of contention even in South Africa, where religious values, cultures and traditions of societies have been at risk due to land grab by industries and multi-nationals.

## **2.2 Theological and Anthropological Problem**

The land problem of the Adivasis, particularly those of the northern part of India, raises a theological question regarding the intrinsic dignity of the human person, created

in the image of God, though this problem is not even recognized as a problem by the dominant Hindu majority. The present political leaders ignore the “development-induced mass displacement” of Adivasis.<sup>11</sup> Vandana Shiva, a popular social activist in India, raises her voice on behalf of oppressed Adivasis against the corporations. She condemns the industrialists (multi-nationals) for misusing the term “development” to mask their own gain and selfish motives.<sup>12</sup> Millions of people are victims of this phenomenon, so why is this problem not addressed? This question remains to be addressed truthfully.

Liberation theologian Ignacio Ellacuría would see this problem as a “collective sin,” one which needs to be addressed theologically in order to liberate oppressed Adivasis, showing them hope for the Kingdom of God in the here and now. The land problem becomes a revelatory text, showing us how theologians can address this crucial problem in order to bring about the salvation and liberation of both the oppressed Adivasis and their oppressors, the dominant Hindu society. In order to respond theologically, however, it is essential to first analyze the historical trajectory of the land alienation suffered by the Adivasis.

### **3. Historical Background of Adivasi Land Grab in India**

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<sup>11</sup> Dev Nathan and Virginius Xaxa, *Social Exclusion and Adverse Inclusion: Development and Deprivation of Adivasis in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 55. In the name of development, the indigenous peoples are forcibly displaced from their cultivating lands by the corporate sectors. The multi-national companies are being established in the farming lands, which are rich in coal-mines, minerals and oil industries. In many cases the farmers are not compensated for their lands at all. Resettlement, re-compensation and relocation have been some of the common catastrophes of the land alienation.

<sup>12</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice* (Berkeley: North Atlantic books, 2008), 13. In biology, the term development refers to self-directed, self-regulated and self-organized from within. In the term of Chilean scientists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, systems that self-organize and self-renew are *autopoietic* systems. In the language of David Pimentel of Cornell, *autopoietic* systems are based on endosomatic or metabolic energy. In economics, Development is an extremely driven process. It refers to self-organizing, self-regulating systems as “undeveloped” and “underdeveloped” and suggests that they should be made dependent on external inputs-external resources, energy and money.



The land grab has become a common phenomenon in many developing countries in the world. We hear many stories from around the world of people losing their land. Often, people's ancestral land, property, and valuable possessions have been seized for the "development" of their respective nations. There are also many instances where people themselves have protested against the governments and their developmental projects, schemes that have jeopardized particular ethnic groups and brought about arrests and mass annihilations of entire villages. Land alienation has occurred throughout the centuries, from time immemorial. The grabbing of Adivasi land in India is not a new phenomenon. However, the loss of land by Adivasis is particularly devastating because it severs the anthropological, socio-economic, religious and ecological relationships of the Adivasis with nature.

The grabbing of Adivasi land also becomes more significant in light of the current ruling party, which views Adivasi land as a valuable asset to urban progress. Ironically, the regime looks at Adivasis as sub-humans and treats them as the demons of Indian society, while having designs on their valuable land.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Adivasis are often the victims of racial discrimination. Jaipal Singh describes them as the "millions of unknown hordes... unrecognized warriors of freedom, the original people of India who have variously been known as backward tribes, primitive tribes, criminal tribes and everything else."<sup>14</sup> Singh, himself an Adivasi, further vented his long-standing grievances and articulated the problem candidly:

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom: Liberation Theologies from Asia* (Eugene, OR: Stock Publishers, 2010), 23.

<sup>14</sup> Nathan and Xaxa, in the book *Social Exclusion and Adverse Inclusion: Development and Deprivation of Adivasis in India*, 19-22.

If there is any group of Indian people that has been shabbily treated it is my people. They have been disgracefully treated, neglected for the last 6,000 years... This Resolution is not going to teach Adivasi democracy. You cannot teach democracy to the tribal people; you must learn democratic ways from them. They are the most democratic people on earth. What my people require is not adequate safeguards... We do not ask for any special protection. We want to be treated like every other Indian... The whole history of my people is one of continuous exploitation and dispossession by the non-aboriginals of India punctuated by rebellions and disorder and yet I take Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru at his word. I take you all at your word that now we are going to start a new chapter, a new chapter of Independent India, where there is equality of opportunity, where no one would be neglected.<sup>15</sup>

Vandana Shiva also considers how indigenous land sovereignty and earth-democracy have been violated by the establishment of SEZs (special economic zones) in the areas where Adivasis live.<sup>16</sup> Even today, the 85 million Adivasis in India continue to struggle to retain their identities and seek empowerment through a constitutional framework that has not yielded outcomes commensurate with their sacrifices of land and livelihood.<sup>17</sup> Yet they need land in order to subsist and flourish. These ongoing struggles on the part of Adivasis indicate that human beings' desire for land will not be extinguished.

The Scriptures present two histories of creation, both of which are concerned with land. The first one, in Genesis 1-11, is about our first parents, who were fully rooted in the land, but underwent expulsion from the land due to their broken relationship with the Creator. The second history, found in Genesis, chapters, 12-50, chronicles the journey of

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Vandana Shiva, Shreya Jani and Sulakhshana, *The Great Indian Land Grab* (New Delhi: Navdanya, 2011), 12-18.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Abraham and his family toward the Promised Land.<sup>18</sup> These two histories establish that the human community has always wanted to possess land in order to flourish. We see from the history of the struggles of Adivasis to hold on to their land, that like the Hebrew people, Adivasis have always been in the frontiers. Land has always been central to every dimension of their existence—the most important source of identity, livelihood, emotional attachment, social stability, and sense of the sacred.<sup>19</sup>

## **2.1 The Imposition of the British Zamindari System**

Historically, the Adivasi land grab began during the medieval period but accelerated rapidly during the British regime through the introduction of the Zamindari System,<sup>20</sup> which enforced the Permanent Settlement Act in 1793. The British introduced a centrally organized administration, a judiciary system which imposed the concept of private property as opposed to the traditional notion of collective usufructuary rights of the community.<sup>21</sup> The Adivasis' community resources were considered to be public properties and were taken over by the British rulers. This system created an upheaval in the Adivasi community.

In the ancient period, the Adivasis had ownership rights of the natural resources and judiciously used these resources for their survival. The Adivasis lived with

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<sup>18</sup> Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 16-17.

<sup>19</sup> Nathan and Xaxa, *Social Exclusion and Adverse Inclusion*, 22.

<sup>20</sup> The British introduced a system to grab the lands which were owned by the indigenous people by imposing a law. *Zamindar* means a man of the land or Landlord. They were sort of a micro-king who ruled their small territory by collecting taxes, running a court to resolve disputes, maintaining a military, and building palaces. In most cases, they had to share a big chunk of their taxes with the Lord above them (possibly a local king). Just like one would pay income taxes to the government, one will pay taxes to the local Zamindary, who will exercise great control over one's life.

<sup>21</sup> Gladson Dungdung, *Whose Country Is It Anyway? Untold Stories of the Indigenous Peoples of India* (Kolkata: Adivaani, 2013), 17.

autonomy, peace and prosperity. They freely practiced their tradition, culture, religion, and language, and their unique identities revolved around their ancestral land.<sup>22</sup> The situation changed after the Aryan invasion and rule (1500-100 BCE), which destroyed the Adivasi civilization, nearly annihilated the indigenous identity, and denied Adivasis' status as fellow human beings. Gladson Dungdung, one of the local social activists of India and a prolific writer, notes that the Adivasis were called 'rakshas' (demons). They were slaughtered in large numbers, and the survivors and their descendants were degraded and humiliated. For centuries they suffered all manner of atrocity at the hands of those who sought to grab their ancestral lands.<sup>23</sup> The Aryans invaded and captured the Adivasis, and later the Mughal and the British Empires largely destroyed them. They were forcefully displaced from their territory in the name of growth and development, and pushed into forests and hills, where they survived under conditions of miserable poverty and illiteracy, and suffered from epidemic diseases.

Even after India's independence in 1947, the perception, mindset, ideology and behavior of the ruling elite remained the same. Even Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, who is popularly known as the architect of India, encouraged the Adivasis to suffer by saying, "If you are to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the country."<sup>24</sup> Since then, the Adivasis have been suffering miserably for the interest of the country, but the country does not care about their pain. Their cry is never heard and their tears are never wiped away. The reality of the narrative is that the Adivasis are born to

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>23</sup> The Supreme Court order on the SLP (Cr) No. 10367 of 2010 Kailas and others Vs State of Maharashtra.

<sup>24</sup> Dungdung, *Whose Country Is It Anyway? Untold Stories of the Indigenous Peoples of India*, 3.

suffer in their own country in the name of national interest, growth and development.<sup>25</sup>

The data indicates that “from 1951 to 2004, over 37 million people were displaced mainly due to dams, canal construction and mining industries in the name of development in India. The Indian Government accepts a national figure of over 50 million immigrants arising from ‘development-related-displacement.’”<sup>26</sup> Thus, we have a long history of land grab, which can be summarized in three distinct eras or periods, in which the Adivasi people were uprooted from their lands by various elite groups in the name of the “development of India.”

## **2.2 The pre-Independence Era**

In the *pre-Independence era* (1824-1894), the British colonizers introduced various systems such as the Zamindari System and the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 to grab lands from Adivasis. They destroyed the concept of “collective community rights” and imposed the concept of “public purpose.” In the name of “public purpose,” many developmental projects were introduced, but their benefits never reached the Adivasis, who were supposed to be the first beneficiaries.

## **2.3 The Independence Era**

During *the Independence era* (1947-1950), the land grab accelerated because Nehru considered dams to be the “temples of modern India.” According to him, the big dams would address the issues of hunger and poverty in India.<sup>27</sup> The big industries such as heavy engineering corporations, Bokaro, Steel Limited, and the coal mining industries

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Jharkhand Journal of Development and Management Studies Vol. 2, December 2004. <http://xiss.ac.in/jidms/Vol14/Issue3to4/>. Accessed on January,15, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 111.

were established, which only created pain, suffering and misery for the inhabitants of the land (mostly the Adivasis).

#### **2.4 The Post-Independence Era**

In *the post-Independence era*, land became like gold. The number of multinational companies has mushroomed, and the special economic zones (SEZs) have increased to 237. They seized the land from the Adivasis in the name of “urban progress” and promoted false narratives of “inclusive growth democracy.” The industrial and urban development triggered forced displacement of the indigenous peoples. The language of “‘right of way’, of ‘footprints’ for new industries of ‘special economic zones’ (SEZs) or of ‘protected areas’ (Pas) and ‘exclusion zones’ became louder than before,”<sup>28</sup> all of which caused physical and economic displacement and untold misery for the Adivasis.

Dungdung further narrates the untold stories of the indigenous peoples of India and exposes the truth of the Adivasis’ decades-long struggle against discrimination, exploitation, alienation, displacement and injustice. On the one hand, they face state and nationally-sponsored crimes against them, and on the other hand, the “educated” Brahmanical industrialists and “civilized” people of mainstream elite society treat them like sub-humans and beasts.<sup>29</sup> The very core of their human rights is being denied. Injustice and atrocities are inflicted upon them daily. The lives of indigenous peoples are increasingly at stake in the face of the pro-industrial bias of the current political regime, which fails to keep the promises made in the Constitution. The constitutional guarantees of social and economic justice, the right to a dignified life, liberty, and equality in

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<sup>28</sup> Dungdung, *Whose Country Is It Anyway?*, cited in A. B. Ota (ed.), *Development Induced Displacement and the Tribals* (Bhubaneswar: SC & ST Research Institute, 2009), 1-5.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, IX.

education and healthcare for everyone are being severely undermined.<sup>30</sup> The government, the industrialists, and the media are exerting great effort to persuade the Adivasis that industrialization is the only way to develop the country. Therefore, according to this argument, the Adivasis must surrender their land for the development projects, which would provide them with jobs and infrastructure, and boost the economy of the country.<sup>31</sup>

### **3. Land as a Double-Hermeneutical Prism to Interpret Biblical Adivasi Faith**

For Adivasis, land is a place that has meaning because of the history lodged there, because of the stories and events that have taken place. The central problem of this issue is not emancipation of Adivasis, but *rootage*. It is not only about making meaning of their historical events and stories, i.e., *belonging*. It is not about separation from the broader community, but about the placement and *location* of their own tribal society in the face of massive displacement. It is not about isolation, but about the ability to transfer the land from one generation to the next—about *placement* between the generations of promises.<sup>32</sup> Ellacuría would treat this historical reality of the Adivasis as their prism of divine revelation. He would consider “revelation and situation” as two crucial poles. The treatment of the two poles together in a double-hermeneutical method, I will argue, would help Adivasis to understand the historicity of their struggles and the saving character of the crucifixion of the people, who, in their dying and rising, extend the life, death, and saving work of Jesus in history. In other words, they would better understand the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>32</sup> Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 201.

historical character of the salvation of Jesus and the saving character of the history of crucified humankind.<sup>33</sup>

Adivasis' religious experience, philosophy, anthropology, doctrines, rules, values, and practices emerge from their lands. They express their faith through social customs such as festivals, celebrations, and rituals, and by the performance of folklore in music and dance. These are some of the sources of tribal Christian theology. The Christian faith is incarnated in the tribal culture, and Christ is experienced within the context of the land.<sup>34</sup> Their quest for meaning in Christian life is shaped by the negativities of the suffering inflicted by displacement. This raises certain theological, anthropological, and sociological questions: Where do I come from? Where am I going? What will happen to my faith if I lose my land? Why is my land taken away? In search of answers to these important questions, Adivasis are still unable to hold on to their land as their questions are not yet answered adequately.

Land remains one of the indispensable aspects of Adivasi life as far as the expression of their faith is concerned. Their presence in the land grounds their religious experiences. Land is the theological ground where they encounter the divine. Privatization of land and the uprooting and displacement of innocent people, bring new human hungers catalyzed by urbanization. Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann calls

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<sup>33</sup> Ignacio Ellacuria, *Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, edited with an introduction by Michael E. Lee with commentary by Kevin F. Burke, S. J. (New York: Orbis Book, 2013), 197. As I argue below, the suffering of the Adivasis brings about a new moral imagination regarding others' suffering, which bears fruit in a partiality for the weak and the voiceless. In this way, the suffering of the Adivasis also becomes the leaven of a new political life in India.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 70-71.



this human hunger “a primary category of faith.”<sup>35</sup> This discussion will attempt to correlate this urgent hunger among Adivasis for rootedness with a re-interpretation of their Christian faith as a journey of redemption and sustainable development with dignity.

The faith of the Adivasis can best be understood using a Hegelian dialectical model. In the dialectical process, land becomes a mediation between faith and life. Land becomes a reflection of the socio-historic experience of Adivasis. Their language and religious symbols humanize the land, promoting life in the community. The dialectical movement of faith and life is an on-going process. Land mediates all cultural forms for Adivasis. Faith is re-lived on their land. This mediation is also a reflection of social structure, kinship relationships, and the socio-historic experiences of Adivasi society. In short, Adivasis’ land embodies their religion and faith. A re-interpretation of faith (grounded in a living memory, an element in the consciousness of the community) becomes Adivasis’ living hope. Faith is a living memory oriented towards the future as hope: hope is a future that is realizing itself. This hope based on faith/memory in turn makes the present meaningful.

#### **4. An Adivasi Theology of Land**

In the indigenous communities, land is held in high regard, managed and allocated according to people's needs and the number of children they have. It is not inherited individually, passed on from owner to owner, but is redistributed and thus not regarded as private property.<sup>36</sup> As for Israel, land was a locus of slavery, and landlessness was the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>36</sup> Dina Ludena Cabrian, "The Sources and Resources of Our Indigenous Theology", *The Ecumenical Review*, 64:2 December 2010; Special Issue on "Perspectives on Indigenous Theologies and

experience that ran its course from the splendor of Solomon to the frightened, pitiful days of Jehoiachin and his son, who ended in disgrace and exile. Like Israel, Adivasis also have a strong gift of kinship that shapes the monarchy in their society. The kinships have arisen from the land and have become tribal political powers in their communities. In fact, the monarchy and kinships of Adivasis are the impetus of the modern democratic government of India. Sadly, the purpose of monarchy and kinship among the ancient tribal societies was to unite people, but modern Indian society seems to be dividing peoples rather than uniting them. What Brueggemann describes with regard to Israel applies to the Indian context, "The very land that once created space for human joy and freedom of religion has become the very source of dehumanizing exploitation and oppression."<sup>37</sup> Landlessness is indeed a problem for Adivasis, leading them into the wilderness and causing a drought of peace among communities.

The spirituality of the Adivasis reflects a holistic vision of an egalitarian, life-centered and land-centered reality, which is experienced as inter-connected and inter-related.<sup>38</sup> "Land is life, there is no life without land" is the slogan of indigenous people all over the globe. This is a part of Adivasis' holistic vision of life. Aseem Shrivastava and Ashish Kothari, in search of alternative models of development, assert that the "*Adivasi* peoples around the world have mostly lived by an instinctive sense of ecological integrity

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Spiritualities," 370.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Wati Longcaer, quoted in Maria Chavez Quispe, "Affirming spiritualities of life: Indigenous Peoples' Wisdoms and Traditions in Theological Conversation", World Council of Churches: Indigenous Peoples' Program, Just and Inclusive Communities Geneva: WCC, 2010.

because they have stayed true to the place of their birth.”<sup>39</sup> Adivasis’ profound respect for land, creation, non-transferability and non-ownership of the land, and their gratitude toward the Creator, are based on the belief that everything has its origin in and from God. Land is therefore sacred and worthy of special respect. For Adivasis to sell or to transfer a piece of land is an unforgivable sin and a crime. They believe in communal ownership of the land. So the loss of a piece of land is a community loss, a sin against the whole community. It also becomes a serious threat to the integrity of their salvation.<sup>40</sup>

For the Adivasis land is life. The land is their origin, their nourishment, their support, their identity, and their salvation. The land is not mere space, but it is a place where historical events still live. It is a place where their ancestors have fought battles for their faith and existence, and now that memory provides continuity and identity across generations. In this land, important words have been spoken that have established identity, defined vocation, and envisioned destiny. Land is a place in which vows have been exchanged, promises have been made, and demands have been issued by ancestors. Therefore, land is a protest against hopelessness and rootlessness.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Aseem Shrivastava and Ashish Kothari, *Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India* (New Delhi: Penguin, ND 2012), 250-252.

<sup>40</sup> The basis of this latter claim is the “integral salvation” announced by the Church since Vatican II, which is inclusive of the whole human person in all his/her earthly and transcendent dimensions. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church states that “*The salvation offered in its fullness to men in Jesus Christ by God the Father's initiative, and brought about and transmitted by the work of the Holy Spirit, is salvation for all people and of the whole person: it is universal and integral salvation. It concerns the human person in all his dimensions: personal and social, spiritual and corporeal, historical and transcendent.* It begins to be made a reality already in history, because what is created is good and willed by God, and because the Son of God became one of us. Its completion, however, is in the future. . .” (38) (emphasis in text). See [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html), Accessed on February 16, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 4.

Land is also a symbol of unity, which gives identity to the Adivasi community. The land owns the people. If there is no land, there is no community, personhood, or identity. They consider land sacred, reverencing it as mother earth. Land is regarded as divine and thus their spirituality, culture, and languages flow from the land. As mother, the land provides food, medicine, shelter and clothing. It is the source of their independence and livelihood.<sup>42</sup> Being thus organically related to the land, the community as a whole, including non-human creatures, may together claim the land as their mother.

The history of the Adivasis is the starting point of land theology. For them history is not simply a past event but a historical consciousness in which they stand and affirm their identity and existence.<sup>43</sup> From time immemorial, the Adivasis have lived in peace and harmony, but now they are poor, marginalized, downtrodden, and crucified people.<sup>44</sup> Historical reality as source for theology seeks the relevance of the history of the past, but also the divine presence of today. The Adivasis experience God in and through their relationship with the land and forest.<sup>45</sup>

Theology cannot make light of this legitimate yearning. Uprooting, dislocation and displacement were a violation of Torah and a mocking of the covenant God.<sup>46</sup> As the land for Israel was not empty space, but was always a place pervaded by Yahweh, a place

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<sup>42</sup> The meaning of land for the Adivasis is derived from their many myths and legends which describe the genesis of human beings and the creation, the human beings' allegiance to god as well as their relationship with the spirits and other animate and inanimate beings.

<sup>43</sup> Ashok Kujur, "Adivasis: The Uprooted People of the Land," *Jurnal Teologi* Volume 05, no. 02 (November 2016):155-164.

<sup>44</sup> Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 27-36.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

well filled with memories of life and promise and vows to Yahweh,<sup>47</sup> so it is for Adivasis—land evokes a yearning to nurture their relationship with their savior. They look to their God for liberation. They need theologians and prophets from their own land who will help them to understand their faith and fidelity with hope for liberation while they suffer.

#### **4.1 Land and Scrambled Adivasi Identities**

The totality of the Adivasis' life and values is rooted in three life-giving entities: *Jal-Jangal- Jameen*, meaning water, forest and land.<sup>48</sup> Without these essentials, there is no tribal identity. To save the identity of the Adivasis, all these elements need to be saved. The Adivasis of northern India say, *Jaan Denge Jamin Nahin Denge*, meaning, “we will give our life, but we will not give our land.” Habitually, their suffering, pain and struggles have been romanticized by powerful people, but their unrest and struggle for their existence, identity, and survival persists. The land issues of the Adivasis are often considered by the dominant classes as no longer relevant.

Similarly, various terms used in India for Adivasis such as “tribals,” “indigenous people,” and “scheduled tribes,” have been in use for a very long time in the lexicon of the state and of social workers, missionaries, administrators, and political activists, but now they are considered as outdated and insignificant terms. The use of these terms were hardly questioned until their internationalization within the last two decades.<sup>49</sup> Earlier the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Adivasis consider *Jal-Jangal-Jameen* as one of the most precious gifts given by God. Therefore, they want to preserve them and pass on to their future generations. Coincidentally, most of their totems are also derived from *Jal-Jangal-Jameen*.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph Marianus Kujur, *Indigenous People* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2011), 232.

designation of “ancientness” was the sole characteristic of the Adivasis; today, however, the dimension of marginalization has been added. In the context of the identity formation of the tribes of India (the “so called tribes” as Ghurye would call them), the administrative term ‘tribe’, though limited and problematic, “has now been adopted by the tribals themselves to mean the dispossessed, depressed people in the region.”<sup>50</sup> The identity of the people has been internalized. This term, which was once used to mark out differences from the dominant community, has become part of their consciousness and is being used by them for self-affirmation, self-determination, and empowerment.

#### **4.2 Land and the Eschatology of Adivasis**

The land problem has a theological component today. This problem has been long ago trivialized, defused or over-responded to by theological attempts to give meaning to it by means of a universal history, for example, or by optimistic eschatologies of a salvific evolution or by a diminishment of the theodicy question “to a gnosis-like myth about identity and authenticity within human existence.”<sup>51</sup> Why does the Indian government not pay attention to solving this problem? Perhaps government leaders perceive it as a “Christian” problem. Maybe it does not have a solution they are willing to address. Perhaps the powers that be want the weak people to keep on crying. Nevertheless, this seems to be a question of Christian eschatology, though of a prophetically-critical nature. Political theologian Johann Baptist Metz argues that “even the future is no longer what it once was.” Humans “are coming to an ever clearer

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<sup>50</sup> G.S. Gurye, cited in V.K. Mathur, “The Traditional-Modern Continuum: An Assumption in Tribal Development”, *Journal of Social Research*, 10 (2), 1967, 11-25.

<sup>51</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, “Theology as Theodicy?” *A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity* trans by J. Matthew Ashley (NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 58.

consciousness of the dangers and antagonisms that arise when technological and economic processes are left to their own autonomous laws and when our political navigation systems break down.”<sup>52</sup> These dangers include “dying cities, ravaged ecologies, unchecked exploitation of resources, population explosion, information chaos, ever more aggressive and intense conflict between the North and the South, which can ultimately reignite the power struggle between East and West.”<sup>53</sup> Metz also emphasizes that in order to negotiate a process of transformation of consciousness and to negotiate the faith of men and women, we need to secure human dignity as fundamental to their faith.

Uprooted people continue to endure the hermeneutical naïvetés of those who presume to articulate theologically their experience. The land problem is a primordial question of suffering, from the origins of history. Adivasis’ salvation, their apocalyptic dawn, is hidden in their land.<sup>54</sup> They are land-originated people and so their salvation depends on their land. To inflict pain and suffering on the land is a crime against God—a violation of the laws of the covenant God. The cry and inconsolable expectations of the people raise an important question of our fundamental humanity and potency (*epikeia*). Metz quotes Ernst Bloch to argue that the world is progressing towards “inflated time,” in which suffering is considered as a modality of universal interaction between action and

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<sup>52</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Towards a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2007), 97-113.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

<sup>54</sup> Kujur, “Adivasis: The Uprooted People of the Land,” 155-164.

passion.<sup>55</sup> Suffering becomes historical process to shape the consciousness of identity and hope of suffering people.

Metz' theological understanding of the Christian memory of suffering is an anticipatory remembrance which holds the expectation of a specific future for humankind as a future for the suffering, for those without hope, for the oppressed, the disabled, and the useless of this earth.<sup>56</sup> The memory of the suffering of the Adivasis in the face of fanatical Hindu political power brings about a new moral imagination of the Kingdom of God here on earth. Their suffering brings about a new imagination with regard to others' suffering, which would bear fruit in an excessive, uncalculated partiality for the weak and the voiceless. In this way, the suffering of the Adivasis also becomes ferment for a new political life in India. Thus, employing Metz's strategy to reshape the future of the Adivasis will depend on our new re-imagination of human freedom.

According to Metz, human freedom is not autonomous, but theo-nomous, empowered and encompassed by God. The suffering of the innocent Adivasis is not only a history of suffering which raises a general question of human guilt and sinfulness, but also a suffering directed back at God. The Augustinian concept of salvation thus becomes inadequate as a new paradigm for Adivasis because the biblical vision of salvation is implicit in God's salvific work (*soter*), touching not only sin and guilt, but above all deliverance from all the situations of suffering in which men and women find themselves.<sup>57</sup> Suffering due to land issues is a discourse about eschatology—a speech

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<sup>55</sup> Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Towards a Practical Fundamental Theology*, 55.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 112.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 62.



about God. Biblically, the land of the Adivasis contains a promise: the promise of salvation, paired with the promise of a universal justice that salvifically includes even the suffering of the dead.<sup>58</sup> Metz calls stories of remembered suffering “dangerous memories,” those which “disrupt” the Enlightenment narratives of evolutionary progress via the social systems of technological civilization. This form of memory reveals new and “dangerous” knowledge for the present moment. In the following chapters, I will argue that the power of the memory of Adivasi uprootedness and dislocation places demands on all people of good will to stand in solidarity with them in their struggles for integral salvation, which includes a sustainable future in their own sacred lands, and development with dignity.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 61.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**THE VIOLATION OF INDIGENOUS LAND RIGHTS:**  
**A CULTURAL GENOCIDE THAT UNMASKS THE MNCs' CREED**

Dalit rage brought down the Gujarat model and exposed it for what it is – a sickening upper caste pro-corporate policy framework... Discontent is simmering in tribal villages... Sometimes it bursts out in sporadic protests...the power of their anger may not be visible as those of comparatively more organized communities of the oppressed. But don't be surprised if the next big upsurge comes from within Adivasi communities. The government is playing with fire.<sup>1</sup>

– Brinda Karat

**1. Introduction**

From ancient times, land has always been an integral part of human life. Every being on earth depends on land, but the importance one attaches to it varies from person to person, from community to community, from culture to culture. For the Adivasis, or indigenous peoples of central and northern India, as we have seen, land has social, political, economic, and religious significance. Land is a gift from God and the foundation of life itself. Therefore, the inheritance of land insures the survival, continuity and flourishing of the Adivasi community. They believe that land does not belong to them, rather, it is they who belong to the land. They have learnt how to use the land in a sustainable way without causing any permanent damage to it. They have always known the difference between their “needs” and “wants,” a distinction that often eludes people of more “advanced” cultures. This raises a conflict between “us” the urbanized mass and “them” the deprived and marginalized segments of the society.

The possession of land also manifests the community's life with God. The uprooting of Adivasis from their land on the part of the extraction industries in the name

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<sup>1</sup> Brinda Karat, “After Dalit Anger, This Could Be The Next Big Upsurge,” (Aug 6, 2016), available from <http://www.ndtv.com/opinion/after-dalit-anger-this-could-be-the-next-big-upsurge-1441049>, accessed Aug 6, 2016.

of “*development*” is an unethical and sinful practice.<sup>2</sup> Such dislocation causes unemployment, poverty, homelessness, psychological stress, and violates the human rights of the indigenous peoples at multiple levels. People are uprooted from their faith, culture, and the tradition of their ancestors. Such uprooting also breeds violence, religious intolerance and societal unrest, as the oppressed turn against the powerful and dominant elites of society, seeking justice. This clash has taken a new and dangerous turn in recent years with the unprecedented rise in the number of Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) operating in tribal areas.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, I analyze the issue of displacement induced by the MNCs through the lens of a rights-based ethics, which advocates for the protection of the rights of Adivasis and other vulnerable people, all of whom cry out for the most basic of all human needs—a place to be at home—to flourish in the land.

## 6. The Cosmic Vision of Liberation

The struggle of the Adivasis to protect their lands against the MNCs is an old story, but it has sought renewed attention in the last two decades. It has unmasked multiple problems such as the political strategy of cultural, social and religious genocide of Adivasis. The displacement of the Adivasis from their land also appears to be a political game of the Modi government, which plans to uproot the indigenous peoples from Indian soil in order to establish *Ram Rajya* (the kingdom of Lord Rama). The pragmatic approach of globalized development is a dangerous churning pathway because it is going to destroy the ecological biodiversity, harm the earth and create a great political, economic and ecological chasm. It is going to bring about social, cultural

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<sup>2</sup> Shiva, *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Justice*, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Pushpanjali Satpathy and Sikhya Babu, “Report on IND Bharat Land Acquisition Study,” (November 19, 2016) available from <http://www.tribaltribune.com/main.php>, accessed November 19, 2016.

exclusion and increase inequalities and environmental crisis. The flavor of the churning pathway of development is going to be bitter. Undoubtedly, India is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, but on a pathway that is leading it to genocide of rich Adivasi culture and trampling of their basic human rights. The cry of Adivasis for rootedness is the cry of the earth. This chapter will analyze the way in which the tribal unrest in central India has taken on violent means (Maoist insurgency) of protest against the globalized development.

This chapter draws primarily on the socio-political and anthropological studies of others to analyze the Adivasi historical reality rather than on my own empirical observation or experience among the Adivasis. At the same time, I write from the perspective of one who has been affected personally by the impacts of the globalized development that is inducing Adivasi displacement. I, along with my family and other victims, am one of the witnesses to testify that the government of India is going to war against ecology and its own indigenous population, spurred on by MNCs and their false promises of economic development. Hence, this chapter seeks to offer objective analysis informed by subjective, and very personal, experience.

Indian politicians say repeatedly that we must have more growth to reduce or eradicate poverty. The metaphor is that the cake must get bigger for people to have a larger share, especially the poorest. However, the real beneficiaries do not seem to be the poorest but the rich and the Brahmins. Recently, the Indian media did a full analysis of the benefits of 25 years of economic liberalization.<sup>4</sup> Sadly, tribals, Dalits, and an ever-

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<sup>4</sup> Government of India, "Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas," (Report of an Expert Group to the Planning Commission, 2008), 28; available from [http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/publications/rep\\_dce.pdf](http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/publications/rep_dce.pdf), accessed Nov 1, 2016.

increasing number of the working poor were just footnotes in the entire discourse. However, their plight is becoming more desperate and more visible. India's present model of growth is driving not only its economic paradigm but the paradigm of how society should approach sustainable forms of eco-economics. It is generating non-sustainability, inequality and deep violence within society. Our amazing pluralism of cultures is being reduced to uniformity. The dominant culture seems to be fast swallowing up a rich variety of other traditions.<sup>5</sup>

Vandana Shiva shines a light on the advent of industrial uprising, showing how the “shadowboxing” of the political agenda poses a serious threat to a sustainable culture.<sup>6</sup> Shiva presents two different metaphors, the “Sacred Cow” and the “Sacred Car” to represent two cultures competing with one another. The “Sacred Cow” represents the biodiversity and sustainable culture, and the “Sacred Car,” non-sustainable, fossil-fuel industrial culture. Shiva also shows how the Sacred Car triumphs over the Sacred Cow culture, uprooting local communities from their land, depriving them of their right to life and sustenance. The acquisition of land also leads to human rights violations at multiple levels, such as the right to education, health care, job opportunities and other basic needs of food, clothing and shelter.

My exploration begins by recognizing that there is a deep existential crisis in the tribal belt despite empowerment policies of the government. Having considered anthropological, cultural, and existential consequences on the Adivasis affected by

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid,14.

<sup>6</sup> The term ‘shadowboxing’ is a human rights term. Here shadowboxing is utilized as an ethical analytic tool to analyze the fight between MNCs and Brahmin culture. The term shows the internal logic of MNCs and external political dynamics of Brahmin oppressive culture that ignores the impact of climate crisis caused by displacement.

displacement, this chapter underscores reasons for tribal resistance and illustrates radical ecological democracy as an alternative path to inclusive and sustainable development that protects the indigenous rights and their land.

### **7. Indigenous Land Alienation and Displacement**

India is the largest country in South Asia, covering an area of 3,288 thousand square kilometers, with a population of 1.23 billion (World Development Report, 2002). India accounts for 2.42% of the total world area. Nearly 35% of Indian households live below the poverty line (BPL) and are deprived of basic amenities.<sup>7</sup> Due to inadequate irrigation facilities, inefficient cropping patterns, lack of an appropriate distribution system of seeds and fertilizers, low levels of mechanization, natural calamities and outdated agrarian policies, agriculture contributes only 27.4% of the GDP. The marked disparities of landholding in a society not only yield economic, social, political and cultural disabilities, but also result in poor access to health care services, education and the rural power structure.

In the process of land grabbing, the poor indigenous have been affected the most because of their acute poverty, supernatural beliefs and limited opportunities for development. The indigenous peoples have always been easy prey to moneylenders, traders and exploiters due to their innocence and honesty.<sup>8</sup> N.K Behura and Nilakantha Panigrahi think that the opening of indigenous area to the non-tribals, industrialists, mining corporations and to the state in the name of development of tribal economy has resulted in large-scale land alienation from tribal land to non-tribals. The indigenous

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<sup>7</sup> N.K Behura and Nilakantha Panigrahi, *Tribals and the Indian Constitution* (New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2006),178.

<sup>8</sup> Shiva, Jani and Fontana, *The Great Indian Land Grab*, 100-119.

peoples are uprooted from their age-old land due to their inability to discharge the loan liabilities incurred or due to policy inadequacies, which failed to protect indigenous land rights.<sup>9</sup> However, according to John Mundu, who belongs to one of the indigenous communities himself, we have a different rhetoric of land alienation. According to Mundu, the Adivasi reality has been a saga of land alienation, exploitation, displacement, and migration.<sup>10</sup> Although Adivasi land alienation began during the medieval period and intensified during the British regime, it has accelerated since the year of independence. With economic liberalization of the 1990s, vast industrial estates and Special Economic Zones are rising, and with them, land sharks who gobble up land.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the British introduced the Zamindari System to collect revenue, worsening the oppression of the Adivasis. The long exploitation and oppression of the indigenous and poor resulted in rebellions, one after the other. There have been a few notable movements, such as the Chota Nagpur Tribal Revolt (1807-08), Munda Rebellion (1832, 1867-80), Santal Rebellion (1885-86), Rampha Rebellion (1879-90) and Madri Kalo Revolt (1898) to challenge the British Rule in India. All these movements generated pressure on the State to protect and promote the land rights of the poor indigenous people and lower caste peasants. In response to these and other Adivasi uprisings, there have been several legislative attempts to check the land alienation of the Adivasis: the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (1908), the Central Provinces Land Alienation Act (1916), the Bihar Tenancy Act (1885), Bombay Land Revenue Code (section 73A), and the Santal Pargana Tenancy Act (1949). These are protective laws that provided the

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<sup>9</sup> John Mundu, "Adivasi Reality: A Saga of Displacement and Migration," in *Enigma of Tribal Life and Culture*, Vincent Aind, ed. (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2009), 47-83.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 47-83.

lower castes with a distinct identity and awakened the government to recognize the rights of these deprived groups and to undertake measures for the removal of social injustice and exploitations. According to these laws, the Adivasi ancestral land cannot be sold or transferred to a non-Adivasi.

Similarly, certain articles of the Indian Constitution are devoted exclusively to the cause of the tribal people: Articles 244, 244A, 275(1), 342, 338(A) and 339. These provisions aim at ensuring social, economic and political equity to tribal people. The provision of the Fifth Schedule enshrined under Article 244 of the Indian Constitution, for example, protects the interest of the Adivasis regarding land alienation. Under this article, the Governor is empowered to repeal any Act enforced by either the Parliament or the Legislative Assemblies, merely through the public notification that the Law is not suitable for the Scheduled Area to have retrospective effect. There are one hundred and twelve blocks of Jharkhand in 14 districts identified as Scheduled Areas.<sup>11</sup> These have been the original home of the Adivasis through the centuries.

More recently, two more laws have been promulgated to protect the interests of the tribal people: The Panchayat Raj Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act 1996 and the Forest Right Act 2006.<sup>12</sup> As a piece of legislation, PESA makes the community-the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>12</sup> The PESA Act came into force on December 24, 1996. This Act extends provisions of panchayats (village council) to the tribal areas of nine states, namely, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan, empowering tribal societies to preserve and conserve their traditional rights over natural resources. All the states with scheduled areas within their geographical boundaries were mandated to amend their existing Panchayat Raj acts incorporating provisions of PESA within a year that is, by December 24, 1997. In accordance with this, the State of Chhattisgarh added new provisions in its Panchayati Raj Act for enabling effective implementation of the PESA Act 1996. For further details see, <http://tribal.nic.in/WriteReadData/CMS/Documents/201211290242170976562pesa6636533023.pdf>, accessed on December 11, 2016.



collective-a legal entity, and it confers on tribal societies who live in Scheduled Areas the right to self-governance. The prime objectives of these legislations are protection of Adivasi land, traditional self-governance and culture.

However, since the year of independence, the government adopted the Western model of industrialization, and the pace of displacement escalated in central India. The Chotanagpur Tenancy Act was amended in 1947 for urbanization, industrialization and development projects. The first Prime Minister of the country, Jawaharlal Nehru's policy of setting up of mega projects relating to industry, dams etc., as the temples of modern India have left tens of thousands of Adivasis displaced. Human rights' activist Gladson Dungdung contends that Nehru is not only the architect of modern India but also of the Adivasi misery.<sup>13</sup> The Adivasi land alienation and displacement are spoken of as "sacrifice" for "national interest" and "the greater common good."<sup>14</sup> Several Government owned projects like Damodar Valley Corporation, Bokaro Steel (1950), the Heavy Engineering Corporation, Uranium Corporation of India Ltd. Mines, the Koel Karo Project (1955), the Patratu Thermal Plant (1960) and several coal mining projects began in Chotanagpur. All these projects were launched with the professed aim of proper rehabilitation and compensation, but the actual story is different. According to one study, the total land acquired in the name of development projects between 1951-1995 is 6,258.895 sq. km. of land out of the total area of Jharkhand of 79,714,000 sq. km.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Dungdung, *Whose Country Is It Anyway? Untold Stories of the Indigenous Peoples of India*, 111-114.

<sup>14</sup> Arundhati Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2002), 43-141.

<sup>15</sup> Alex Ekka and Muhammed Asif, *Development-Induced-Displacement and Rehabilitation in Jharkhand, 1951 to 1995: A Database on its Extent and Nature*, A Research Project Supported by OXFAM India Trust (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2000), 67; as quoted by Mundu, "Adivasi Reality," 63-65.

Although an official database for persons displaced or affected by projects is not available, Alex Ekka estimates the displaced during this period to be as much as 15,503,017, of which 41% belong to the Adivasi community. Only a third of the displaced persons of planned development have been resettled. The entire Adivasi population is under threat of land alienation and displacement today.

Within a decade of its creation in the year 2000, the Jharkhand government signed 104 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with the corporate houses.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and West Bengal signed a long series of MoUs with corporate houses. In order for the MoUs to translate into real money, tribal people needed to be moved. But, as we saw, to forcefully acquire tribal land and turn it over to private mining corporations is illegal and unconstitutional under the PESA. Hence, the State had to find a pretext to acquire the lands legally.<sup>17</sup> This acquisition of land violates the fundamental right to life with dignity inscribed in Article 21 of the Indian constitution.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>17</sup>Chanchani, Aditi and Kavita Kanan, *This is Our Homeland: A collection of Essays on the Betrayal of Adivasi Rights in India* (New Delhi: Equations, 2007),161-182.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Marianus Kujur and Sonanjharia Minz (eds.), *Indigenous People of India Problems and Prospects: Essays in Honor of Bishop Dr. Nirmal Minz, an Adivasi Intellectual* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2007), 267-68.

Article 21 of the Constitution of India, 1950 provides that, “No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.” ‘Life’ in Article 21 of the Constitution is not merely the physical act of breathing. It does not connote mere animal existence or continued drudgery through life. It has a much wider meaning which includes right to live with human dignity, the right to livelihood, the right to health, the right to pollution free air, etc. the right to life is fundamental to our very existence without which we cannot live as human being and includes all those aspects of life, which go to make a man’s life meaningful, complete, and worth living. It is the only article in the Constitution that has received the widest possible interpretation. Under the canopy of Article 21 so many rights have found shelter, growth and nourishment. Thus, the bare necessities, minimum and basic requirements that are essential and unavoidable for a person comprise the core concept of right to life. <http://www.lawctopus.com/academike/article-21-of-the-constitution-of-india-right-to-life-and-personal-liberty/>, accessed on February 17, 2017.

Consequently, in 2009, the government of India announced what it called Operation Green Hunt, deploying 200,000 paramilitary troops across central Indian states—the homeland to millions of India’s tribal people and dreamland to the corporate world—against the poorest, hungriest, and most malnourished people in the world.<sup>19</sup> It was euphemistically called “creating a good investment climate.” The government argued that development activities cannot take place in areas infested by Maoist Naxalites until they are cleansed. The Maoists (most of them tribals) were considered to be “India’s gravest internal security threat.” Slain Maoists were displayed like hunters’ trophies, with their wrists and ankles lashed to bamboo poles.

This paramilitary campaign throughout the tribal region is touted as a “war against terrorism,” against the Communist Party of India (CPI). However, Dungdung has argued that the war is not against terrorism, but against the Adivasis. He writes:

[T]his is not a war against terrorism, the so-called Naxalite insurgency by the CPI-Maoists but a war against the Adivasis. The hidden goal is to snatch their resources i.e. their lands, their forests, their water and hills... the war is fundamentally, a war for control over mineral resource and that it threatens the security of all the common people in the Red Corridor and is wrecking their peaceful existence, their good governance, development and prosperity.<sup>20</sup>

In the process, Dungdung concludes, innocent Adivasis are killed, women are sexually exploited, villagers are tortured, youth forced to migrate from their villages, children denied their right to education, development activities are blocked and the entire region is terrorized by both State and non-State actors.<sup>21</sup> Branding all the democratic

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<sup>19</sup> Arundhati Roy, “Walking with the Comrades,” *Outlook*, March 29, 2010, available at <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?264738-1>, accessed on Oct 15, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Gladson Dungdung, *Mission Saranda: A War for Natural Resources in India* (Ranchi: Deshaj Prakashan, 2015), xiii.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 110.

movements as Naxal movements, the State suppresses them.<sup>22</sup> Dissenting voices are suppressed by the government and MNCs. Consequently, the Adivasis are continuing to lose their land, territory, lives, and livelihood. The Adivasis' recent history is characterized as an *Unbroken History of the Broken Promises*.<sup>23</sup>

The Expert Committee report of 2008, commissioned by the Planning Commission, concluded that the development paradigm in the region has benefitted the dominant segments of society at the expense of the poor, causing displacement and reducing them to sub-human existence. The report also affirmed that this model of development destroyed tribal social organization, cultural identity, and resource base and generated multiple conflicts, undermining their communal solidarity, which cumulatively makes them increasingly vulnerable to exploitation.<sup>24</sup> The 2008 Expert Committee Report had also talked of “increased corrupt practices of a rent seeking bureaucracy and rapacious exploitation by the contractors, middlemen, traders and the greedy sections of the larger society intent on grabbing their resources and violating their dignity.”<sup>25</sup>

It is obvious that the Indian State has been promoting crony capitalism in tribal areas rather than enforcing the people's rights and entitlements. Scholars have, therefore, argued that Jharkhand state was created on the basis of political bargains struck between India's political elites, on the basis of opportunism and expediency, rather than a long

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<sup>22</sup> A Naxal or Naxalite is a member of the Communist guerrilla groups in India, mostly associated with the Communist Party of India (Maoist). The term Naxal is derived from the name of the village Naxalbari in West Bengal, where the movement had its origin.

<sup>23</sup> B.D. Sharma, *Unbroken History of Broken Promises* (Delhi: Freedom Press, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Government of India, “Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas,” (Report of an Expert Group to the Planning Commission, 2008), 28; available from [http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/publications/rep\\_dce.pdf](http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/publications/rep_dce.pdf), accessed Nov 1, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Government of India, “Development Challenges in Extremist Areas,” 28.

history of struggles from within the state.<sup>26</sup> The Jharkhand government of the day is trying to amend the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act and the Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act to facilitate acquisition of agricultural lands for non-agricultural purposes like building roads and setting up power projects.<sup>27</sup> Jharkhand tribals are fighting against these amendments for their survival.

## 8. Radical Ecological Democracy

The pervasive nature of the ‘development’ ideology makes any alternative vision rather difficult. Radical ecological democracy (RED) necessitates a huge paradigm shift in governance, in which all citizens have the right and full opportunity to participate in decisions impacting their lives; and where such decision-making is based on the twin principle of ecological sustainability and human equity.<sup>28</sup> RED will encounter considerable resistance from current political and corporate power centers.

The dominant economic development model is thus perilous. A business-as-usual approach resonates with the behavior of the proverbial fool, “cutting the very branch on which he sits.” We may recall the words of Rabindranath Tagore in his long-neglected essay written in 1922, “The Robbery of the Soil”:

Most of us who try to deal with the problem of poverty think only of a more intensive effort of production. We forget that it brings about a greater exhaustion of material as well as of humanity. It gives to the few excessive opportunities for profit at the cost of the many. It is food which nourishes, not money; it is fullness of life which makes one happy, not fullness of purse. Multiplying material wealth

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<sup>26</sup> Alpa Shah, *In the Shadows of the State: Indigenous Politics, Environmentalism, and Insurgency in Jharkhand, India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 20.

<sup>27</sup> UCAN News, (Sept 26, 2016), available from <http://www.ucanindia.in/news/jharkhand-tribals-continue-fight-against-land-law-amendment/33035/daily>, accessed on November 4, 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 256. RED requires a radical form of democracy in which each citizen and community has responsible voice in decision-making-very different from the current representative form of democracy where people vote once in five years and leave all major decisions to those who come to power.

alone intensifies the inequality between those who have and those who have not, and it inflicts so deep a wound on the social system that the whole body eventually bleeds to death.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, Aseem Shrivastava and Ashish Kothari argue for a radical transformation in development policies, priorities and attitudes. They advocate a practice of “radical ecological democracy” as a sustainable and equitable alternative.<sup>30</sup> This framework arises from the numerous grassroots initiatives that have sprung up in India. This new paradigm affirms direct democracy, local and regional economies, cultural diversity, human well-being, and ecological resilience. Critiquing “the dominant values of competitiveness and aggression, greed and covetousness” which are typical of a successful industrial economy, this framework upholds values of “cooperation, compassion, integrity, simplicity, responsibility, equity and loyalty.”<sup>31</sup>

Consumerism has struck deep into the heart of middle class India. Money is the new deity worshipped by the rich. Advocacy of a radical ecological democracy paradigm will face the enormous challenge of overcoming the resistance of entrenched institutions and mindsets. Acceptance of this paradigm entails the spread of the core values underlying the framework. They are basically tribal values. Adivasi society, as we argued above, is based on collectivism, equality, autonomy, and indigenous democracy, not a profit ethos.<sup>32</sup> Traditionally, they have been practicing radical ecological democracy by resisting destructive projects that have caused impoverishment, landlessness,

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<sup>29</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: A Miscellany*, Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), (New Delhi: Sahitya Academi, 1994), 872.

<sup>30</sup> Shrivastava and Kothari, *Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India*, 264-269.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 29-30.

<sup>32</sup> Dungdung, *Untold Stories of the Indigenous Peoples of India*, 25.

homelessness, joblessness, food insecurity, increased morbidity and mortality. They have shown that even small communities, if united can match the influence of some of the world's most powerful corporations.<sup>33</sup> Their values thus stand in sharp contrast to the “pride” of the caste and “greed” of consumerism which largely determine the social oppression and economic exploitation that define the brutal reality of Indian society today. The cultivation of these values is essential if Indian society is to be renewed. Values that are essential for our survival of life are those of caring and sharing, not domination and manipulation. The pattern of domination and exploitation can lead to the silencing of nature and to the ecological death of both nature and humans. The new perspective affirms our inter-relatedness to one another and nature. The scale of values essential for sustaining the inter-relatedness and wholeness of creation differs from the dominant value system of modern society. These values are conservation, not consumerism; need, not greed; enabling power, not dominating power; integrity of creation, not exploitation of nature.

Through the centuries, the Adivasis have developed such a traditional culture that has helped them view their life support system as a community resource inherited from their ancestors, to be judiciously used and preserved for posterity.<sup>34</sup> Their customary culture is community based. Its basic principles are equity and the conservation and proper use of natural resources, what we now term “sustainable development.”

## 9. Conclusion

Seventy years of planned economy has not benefitted all the citizens of India at the same level. Rather, it has elevated some to the peak of riches, and sunk others,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 293.

<sup>34</sup> Dungdung, *Untold Stories of the Indigenous Peoples of India*, 25.

namely, the Adivasis, into the pool of poverty and misery. Industrialization is promoted as the only way to develop. The Indian State sees development and military action as the solution to the violence. In truth, injustice, denial, dispossession, displacement and violation of indigenous rights are some of the foundations of tribal unrest in central India.

Authentic development is about enhancing human freedoms and quality of life and furthering sustainable growth.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, important components of human freedom- and crucial aspects of our quality of life-are thoroughly dependent on the integrity of the environment, involving the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we consume, and the epidemiological surroundings in which we live. The capacity to live the kinds of lives we value-and have reason to value-depends, at the most primal level, on the nature and robustness of the environment. Hence, the Adivasis are battling every day to protect forests, mountains and rivers because they know that these natural resources in their turn protect the Adivasis. Maintaining rapid as well as environmentally sustainable growth remains an important and achievable goal for India. At the heart of this vision lies a profound reverence for the nature that sustains life and connects us all as living beings.

Now, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the Indians are becoming conscious that human activity-whether economic, political or social-also has an ecological consequence. It is not just a matter of sharing the natural resources of Mother Earth; it is a matter of preserving the very environment which makes it possible for humankind to survive on this planet. If we continue to destroy the planet's atmosphere at the present rate, it will not be long before we destroy humankind itself. We are facing a national crisis. The solution lies not just in economic, political, or technological instruments, but

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<sup>35</sup> Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 43-44.



above all, in the moral and spiritual rejuvenation of Indian society, which should acknowledge its corporate responsibility for the state in which we find ourselves, and seek a resolution to pull back from the brink of disaster.

This will involve the adoption of radical ecological democracy that nurtures tribal values. Renunciation is the key. Greed is identified as the source of the ecological problems, and adopting a simple life-style is the way to suppress greed. Both Hinduism and Buddhism share a vision of life as lived within the great cosmic wheel of *samsara*, and both proclaim that the fundamental problem of life is illusion rooted in selfish desire.<sup>36</sup> Indeed there is truth in this statement that selfish desire divides and separates one being from another. In the case of modern India, the fundamental human problems of old age, sickness and death are compounded by globalized development and urbanization. Greed and violence result in massive violations of human rights, under the pretext of economic development and security.

Living in harmony with nature and keeping their needs to a minimum, the Adivasi communities proclaim the message that the earth is the Lord's, and thus it should not be used indiscriminately to satisfy human avarice. They register a powerful protest against a wasteful lifestyle devoid of any sense of responsibility to the world of nature. They send a strong message to the Western world—criticizing their throw-away culture, and showing that radical ecological democracy is an alternative path to inclusive and sustainable development. This path becomes an alternative vehicle of liberation that safeguards land and protects the indigenous rights, treating even the poorest as global citizens who have equal dignity and privileges. How ironic that those whom Indian

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<sup>36</sup> Darrell J. Fasching and Dell Dechant, *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 106.

society considers the most “backward” may show us the way forward to true and lasting prosperity.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**Protection of Land and Human Dignity Among the Adivasi:**  
**Application of Natural Law and Catholic Social Teaching in Modern India**

“The Earth upon which the sea, and the rivers and waters, upon which food and the tribes of man have arisen, upon which this breathing, moving life exists.”

Prithvi Sukta, Atharva Veda

**1. Introduction**

The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that human dignity is the foundation of a moral vision. Respect for the dignity of all human persons leads to human flourishing and happiness. Lack of respect for the human dignity of certain individuals or groups within a society leads inevitably to injustice and suffering. Today, the value of human life and dignity is threatened in numerous ways – by war, lawlessness, and unjust socio-economic and political structures of our societies. Human dignity is also violated by certain scientific and technological innovations which are often touted as “progress” or “development.” Many of these innovations are causing ecological crisis, which not only threatens the environment, but also jeopardizes the human flourishing of the people who inhabit the endangered areas.

In this chapter, I shall employ Thomas Aquinas’ exposition of natural law and his cosmic teleological vision to explain how the concept of human dignity can be extended to encompass the environment in which human beings live, especially the ancestral lands of the Adivasi, or indigenous peoples, of India. I shall show how land should not be treated merely as an instrument, a fungible means of commodity and production, but as something which possesses its own kind of dignity, because of its inherent connection with human flourishing and the common good. The acquisition of land for industrial developments through mining industries must be evaluated not just in terms of its

economic impact, but also in terms of its human and ecological impact, especially when the acquisition of land results in forced displacement of indigenous peoples. Any form of displacement or uprooting of such people may induce cultural, social, ethical and economic genocide. In this case, the land represents much more than an area that produces raw materials for industry. For the Adivasi, as we have seen the land is their ancestral heritage, their source of food and clothing, and their dwelling place. It is also the spiritual ground on which they live and flourish and find their higher purpose. For them human beings and their environment flourish together, or they perish together. Hence, human dignity and the dignity of nature are interconnected and inseparable.

Here, I shall argue how land can be a ground or revelatory text to assess the theological, moral, economic, anthropological and ecological significance of human dignity. I shall draw resources from natural law of Aquinas and Papal encyclicals to show how human dignity has been the first principle of social justice. I am aware of the difficulty of extending the concept of human dignity beyond the human, and extending the concept of human rights to include ecological justice for the land. For support, I shall consider *Laudato Si'* as my conversation partner. In this recent apostolic letter, Pope Francis advocates the protection of human dignity and ecology in concert, showing them to be intimately connected. I also will draw resources from Adivasi epistemology and their understanding of land, which in many ways mirror Francis' understanding. Along with the "integral ecology" of Francis, I will propose a holistic bio-centric paradigm of ecological conversion, based on human rights thinking. Thus, extension of human dignity

to the environment becomes a new form of charity, hospitality and responsibility that empowers reciprocal and harmonious earth-human relationship. <sup>1</sup>

## 2. Natural Law: Its Source and Its Ends

Saint Thomas Aquinas produced his most famous exposition of natural law in the *Summa Theologiae*. He begins by defining law in general as “an ordinance of reason, promulgated in the community by one who has authority and who cares for the community for the common good”.<sup>2</sup> Then he describes natural law as the participation of the *eternal* law in the rational creature. The eternal law is the reason of divine wisdom directing all actions and movements to their proper ends, for the common good. However, human beings do not have direct, or *immediate*, access to this divine wisdom. Through the mediation of natural law, human reason can determine what God is calling human beings to do. Their God-given reason is capable of reflecting on, and discerning, God’s will.<sup>3</sup>

Aquinas understood human law as a law that was created by civil authorities for the purpose of establishing social order. It provides a standard of conduct that becomes the “rule and measure of acts” in society, according to human wisdom. Natural law, by contrast, provides such a standard by which to judge human actions according to *God’s* wisdom. Hence, natural law, embedded in human reason rather than in the will, sets the

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<sup>1</sup> K. Vishwanath Reddy, ed., *Cultural Ecology of Indian Tribes* (New Delhi: Raj Publications, 2002),7.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen J. Pope, “Natural Law in Catholic Social Teachings,” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, ed. Kenneth R Himes (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 43.

<sup>3</sup> *Pacem in Terris* available at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/John23/j23pacem.htm>, 84. Accessed on December 14, 2016.

fundamental moral standards for all human conduct.<sup>4</sup> As Aquinas said, “human beings ought to live according to nature’s call to fulfill the intrinsic functions built into the structure of human nature.”<sup>5</sup>

Charles E. Curran in his book *The Development of Moral Theology* explains how natural law is a classical, non-historical consciousness that helps all people to address the social and traditional issues of [society] and the Church.<sup>6</sup> He further illustrates that from a theological and ethical perspective, Christians share a common source of moral wisdom and knowledge with all others. According to Curran, humans also share an ethical aspect of natural law with others [ecology] for determining how people should live their lives.<sup>7</sup>

Outside the Catholic Church there has been much debate and dissention about natural law. However, within the Catholic Church, especially within the Scholastic tradition, epitomized by Aquinas’ work, theologians have come to consensus about the role of natural law and its foundations in Scripture. In particular, they cite the so-called *Golden Rule*, the moral precepts of the Decalogue, the exhortations of the Prophets, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As Pope Saint John XXIII said in *Pacem in Terris*:

The human race is ruled by a two-fold rule, namely, natural law and custom. The natural law is that which is contained in the law and the Gospel by which each person is commanded to do to others what he would wish to be done to himself, and forbidden to render to others that which he would not have done to himself. Hence, Christ [says] in the Gospel, ‘All things whatever that you would wish

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen J. Pope, “Natural Law in Catholic Social Teachings,” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, 43.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>7</sup> *Pacem in Terris* available at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/John23/j23pacem.htm>. Accessed on December 14, 2016.

other people to do to you, do the same also to them. For this is the law and the prophets.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, St. Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, claims that Gentiles, who do not possess the written Law revealed to the Jewish people, keep it as by instinct, for the demands of the law are inscribed in their hearts (Romans 2:14-15). Aquinas describes natural law as “the innate force” by which intrinsic human nature inclines, but by no means determines, the will of a free human being to his or her proper end.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the Scholastic tradition speaks of *synderesis*, the capacity of practical reason to apprehend intuitively the first principles of human action. This innate capacity is manifested in what we typically call our “conscience.” Hence, St. Paul says that the Gentiles’ conscience bears witness together with the law. They will be judged according to both the interior and the exterior law, for both make moral claims on them.

For Aquinas, the first basis of natural law is the creation of human beings in the image and likeness of God, as described in Genesis 1:26-27. Aquinas interprets the “likeness of God” to mean participation in divine reason, which guides human reason. This innate capacity, by which human and divine reason are joined, allows human beings to discern between good and evil. Furthermore, it inclines human beings toward actions which are judged by God to be proper or right. So, natural law directs human reason to fulfill the first principle of practical reason – to “do good and avoid evil” – and moves it to seek what is proper and right, for oneself and for others.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 82.

Aquinas puts great emphasis on virtue, which he defines as happiness, excellence or perfection of a person.<sup>10</sup> For him morality is based on what is good or perfective of the person.<sup>11</sup> Obeying natural law, thus, brings about human fulfillment and flourishing, for in the process of becoming virtuous, the human person achieves those ends. However, Aquinas also emphasizes that the human person participates in the divine action through his or her duties and obligations to others. Hence, natural law is directed not only toward personal happiness, fulfillment and flourishing, but also toward increasing those goods in others. It is in this way that natural law inclines all human beings to seek the common good. Charles E. Curran considers Aquinas' approach to be "intrinsic teleology, but distinguished from extrinsic teleology of utilitarianism."<sup>12</sup> For Aquinas, natural law dictates that which contributes to the good of the person and/or the society, to help all achieve their proper ends of happiness, fulfillment, and flourishing.

## **2.1 Natural Law, Human Rights and Human Dignity in Catholic Social Teaching**

Many Popes have relied heavily on natural law arguments in their articulation of Catholic Social Teaching. Natural law, with its goal of human flourishing, easily supports efforts to establish social and economic order in the world, for the promotion of the common good. Natural law arguments have been translated into the language of rights and duties of workers who sought economic and political justice. It has also found expression in the right to life, rights to culture, and rights to economic and political life.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/aquinas/section1.rhtml>. Accessed on December 14, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Charles E. Curran, *The Development of Moral Theology: Five Strands* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 85.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* For utilitarianism, something is good if it contributes to the greatest good of the greatest number.



Most recently, natural law also has become the basis for ecological rights, or justice for the earth itself.

Throughout all of these different strains of Catholic Social Teaching, human dignity remains the most central and fundamental principle. All aspects of social justice touch on human dignity in one way or another. The human being, made in the image and likeness of God, is meant to flourish and reach perfection, according to natural law. Thus, any action which deprives human beings of their freedom to pursue perfection or impedes their flourishing is an offense against human dignity and a violation of natural law.

Pope Leo XIII is generally credited as the first pope to advocate for social justice, in our modern understanding of that term, with his groundbreaking encyclical on the “Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor” (*Rerum Novarum*). And he used natural law arguments to make his case for the rights of workers. He said that “the most sacred law of nature” demands that a father provide food and necessities for his children (no.9 O-S,18). He condemned socialism, stating that it was against natural justice and contrary to the natural rights of workers (no. 11 and 12). The inhuman treatment of workers because of the industrial revolution moved the Church to advocate for their rights. At this point, human dignity became the norm and standard by which the political, social and economic structures were to be judged.<sup>13</sup> A new understanding of responsibility in terms of rights emerged. The Scriptures which underpinned natural law – the Golden Rule, the Decalogue, the Prophets, and the Gospel – all seemed to demand justice and solidarity,

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Henriot, Edward DeBerni and Michael J. Schultheis *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret* (Washington, DC: Orbis Book, 1994), 35. Also see *the New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, by Judith A. Dwyer (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), also see *Rerum Novarum* available at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo13/113rerum.htm>. Accessed on December 14, 2016.

especially with the poor and the most vulnerable in human society. The recognition of mutual rights and duties (no. 91 and 96) became another way of living the Golden Rule. It was an enactment of the new Commandment of Jesus in the modern language of human rights.

During the 1930's it was severe economic injustice, fostered by the extremes of both unfettered capitalism and communism, that led to growing social injustice and threatened human dignity. The world-wide depression brought about an awareness of the importance of human dignity that served the common good. The depression had created a severe gap between the rich and the poor throughout the world. The world needed appropriate structures of government, a sense of social justice, and a just wage, all of which were addressed in *Quadrogesimo Anno* by Pius XI in 1931.<sup>14</sup>

Three decades later, in his encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, published in 1961, John XXIII addressed the misuse of power, which was becoming a significant reality harming human dignity. He argued that the power to participate in political processes was essential to the preservation and development of human dignity.<sup>15</sup>

Two years later, in *Pacem in Terris*,<sup>16</sup> John XXIII warned of the growing threat of nuclear war, which not only threatened to destroy the planet, but also choked off the development of peoples, particularly the poor. His contention was that peace could be established only if the social order set down by God was fully realized. Relying

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Also see *Quadrogesimo Anno* available at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius11/P11QUADR.HTM>. Accessed on December 14, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> See *Mater et Magistra* available at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/John23/j23pacem.htm>. Accessed on December 14, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> *Pacem in Terris* available at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/John23/j23pacem.htm>. Accessed on December 14, 2016.

extensively on reason and the natural law tradition, he proposed a list of rights and duties to be followed by individuals, public authorities, national governments and the world community. He emphasized that peace must be based on an order “founded on truth, built according to justice, vivified and integrated by charity, and put into practice in freedom” (#167).

He enshrined human dignity as the highest character of the human person, who is endowed with intelligence and free will. Affirming the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), he asserted that the human person has universal and inviolable rights and duties (#9). Life in community was the context in which human dignity was to be protected and expanded.<sup>17</sup> This was the first time that the language of human dignity was expressed in terms of the full range of rights and duties in Church teaching. It was an innovation that bridged the Scholastic understanding of natural law and a modern understanding of human rights. The moral imperatives of natural law became concrete in the form of rights and duties to our fellow human beings.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) wrestled with articulating a “modern” understanding of the role of the Church in the world. Ideological divisions in the world threatened human dignity. Therefore, the Council underscored that human dignity could be defended only if we recognized that human institutions and human persons were not static, but developed and changed through history. In *Gaudium et Spes*, human dignity

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Henriot, Edward DeBerni and Michael J. Schultheis, *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret*, 45. Also see <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/John23/j23pacem.htm>. Accessed on December 14, 2016.

was presented positively as the right to share in the decisions that structure political, social and economic life.<sup>18</sup>

Shortly after the Council, in 1967, Paul VI issued his encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, in which he explored the concept of “integral development.” It is the notion that human dignity is protected only by promoting the development of the whole human being in every area of life – political, social and economic. The dehumanizing effects of urbanization were becoming widespread. Growing numbers of poor, especially women and children, the elderly and the handicapped, were increasingly vulnerable to being exploited. In response, Paul VI issued an apostolic letter, *Octogesima Adveniens*, in 1971. The title, translated as “Eightieth Anniversary” (of *Rerum Novarum*) called to mind Pope Leo XIII’s seminal work which first defined Catholic Social Teaching. This apostolic letter enshrined a theological vision of human dignity seeking practical means of promoting human dignity as well.<sup>19</sup>

John Paul II, in his encyclicals *Laborem Exercens* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (the latter issued on the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*), took up the question of economic development and the serious threat to human dignity posed by the exploitation of workers in the name of development. He reasserted the priority of labor over capital. He underlined that the human being was the “subject” of work and must always be respected. He made a significant contribution to the development of the concept of solidarity in the light of human dignity.

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<sup>18</sup> See *Populorum Progressio* available at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6develo.htm>. Accessed on December 14, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> See *Laborem Exercens and Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* available at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091981\\_laborem-exercens.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html). Accessed on December 14, 2016.

### 3. Human Rights and Ecological Rights in Natural Law

Natural law theory recognizes that one finds ethical wisdom and knowledge not only in Scripture and in the person of Jesus Christ, but also in all of humanity and in ecology. In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas says that “the natural law is common to humans and the animals and it is an ordering of reason for the common good made and promulgated by one who has charge of the community.”<sup>20</sup> So, the heart of natural law is to bring about social order in all human communities and ecosystems. In sum and substance, the notion of natural law is to bring about harmony, biodiversity, sustainable development and a natural order in the world where all have equal rights.

Humans share with other biotic and non-biotic creatures certain biological inclinations – for food, water, sex, security, shelter and the preservation of their existence and common home. Humans also share with one another rational, epistemological and social inclinations to know the truth about God and to live in political community. This inter-relationality is reflected clearly in John XIII’s encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, in which he emphasizes that “the common good touches the whole man, the need both of his body and his soul” (#57). This basic human need moves one to seek justice and preserve rights. Aquinas arrives at a similar conclusion by reflecting on the nature of virtue and its ultimate end, the beatific vision. He sees cardinal and theological virtues as assets which are animated by grace to empower and order the human person toward the beatific vision, the ultimate experience of happiness. But, in order to reach that beatific vision, one needs to follow the path of justice, which is woven in “rights.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Stephen J. Pope, “Natural Law in Catholic Social Teachings,” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, 44.

In our technocratic age, our morality is mediated by various religious, cultural, economic, social and ecological impacts. Since the advent of the United Nations, and especially the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, people increasingly see the protection of human dignity as intrinsically good and promoting human flourishing and the common good. However, human rights and human dignity cannot be protected in isolation from the environment in which human beings live. Hence, obligations to preserve human rights and human dignity must also be extended to encompass ecology, which has tremendous power to mediate human flourishing or human suffering. Human beings depend on the earth, soil, air, water and all other natural elements for their own flourishing. Therefore, all elements of the earth also deserve dignity and respect, and make moral claims on human beings.

Some types of modern development, discussed earlier in this thesis, raise serious questions about the indiscriminate and unsustainable use of science and technology, with little reflection on its impact on the land and its people. While economic growth, health, and security are certainly intrinsic goods which support human flourishing, one must ask whether unsustainable development meets the standards set by natural law.

#### **4. From Human Dignity to Ecology**

The series of papal documents outlined above has reshaped and expanded our notion of natural law, human rights, and human dignity. Equipped with this teaching, the Church is now poised to take up new challenges that affect human flourishing and the social order. It can forcefully and persuasively apply its natural law arguments to issues such as climate change and ecology, reminding us of the full range of human activities that either enhance or degrade human dignity.

The holistic, cosmic vision that Aquinas puts forward in his exposition of natural law encourages us to cultivate those virtues which lead to human flourishing, not human destruction.<sup>22</sup> Such virtues can shape (or “perfect,” as Aquinas would say) our character and deepen our relationship with God and with nature at the same time. By seeking the common good in all the varied ways explored in Catholic Social Teaching, human beings are empowered to transform our world and be transformed ourselves, through the conversion of our hearts. The key concept, expressed time and time again in all the Church documents cited above, is human dignity. All human actions must be evaluated in light of their impact on human dignity, both directly and indirectly. Natural law impels us to avoid not only direct violations of human rights, but also indirect assaults on human dignity, such as the destruction of ecosystems, illegal or immoral acquisition of land, and other improper uses of natural resources. The *telos* of the human person should be to build right relationship with God, others and all creation and to avoid any actions which harm those relationships. Hence, we must see ecology “as the face of the other,” in the language of Emmanuel Levinas.<sup>23</sup> We must see creation not as mere object, but as a subject of God’s redeeming grace and the locus of human flourishing. We must understand the true meaning of humanity, which is fully expressed in an earth-centered or

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<sup>22</sup> The holistic vision is one in which different kinds of beings encountered in the world are seen as similar by virtue of their having sprung forth from one common source of existence. This epistemological understanding contributes to a new perspective in which environmental care and protection becomes a higher priority for all human beings.

<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey Bloechil, ed. *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000),3-10.

creation-centered approach.<sup>24</sup> Human beings are called to be “noble masters” and “guardians” of creation, not heedless “exploiters” and “destroyers.”<sup>25</sup>

In *Pacem in Terris* John XIII expressed the essential interconnectedness of faith and human rights through a diagram with ever-widening circles of concern, with human dignity at the very center. From that core concern, people of faith are led outward by stages to embrace the full range of human rights. However, the next step, incorporating ecological rights and care for the environment which supports human flourishing, is the main subject of the latest papal encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, by Pope Francis.

Pope Francis reminds the world that environmental crisis is not something that just happens by natural means. It is a result of sin, an alienation from human dignity. The current climate crisis is an “urgent challenge,” for it threatens our common home. It is a global problem which, therefore, requires global planning and global human interventions, stemming from a global vision of “interconnectedness.” The lack of interconnectedness and interdependence has led to excessive privatization of resources, increasing the stratification of society and depriving many of physical contact with nature.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, this alienation from our fellow human beings distances from peoples’ consciousness the essential links between human dignity, care for the environment, and the common good.

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<sup>24</sup> Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth: Catholic Social Teaching* (New York: Orbis Books, 2012), 412-438.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 415.

<sup>26</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, Encyclical Letter on care for our common home (Rome: The World among us Press, 2015), 36-37.



Francis also makes an essential link between care for the environment and care for the poor. The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor both reflect an ongoing assault on the image of God. Both plead for hospitality and care. Therefore, protection of our environment and the poor becomes the highest human vocation.<sup>27</sup>

Francis exposes several issues of great and growing concern, and he offers some direction toward finding solutions. For example, the disproportionate use of natural resources by the global north have left a huge “ecological debt” on developing nations. Francis suggests that there should be “differentiated responsibilities.” Developed nations should have higher responsibilities for taking care of the planet, because they have a more privileged place in the global economic order. The developing nations also should take responsibility, but according to their lesser capacities.

Francis also calls attention to short-sighted approaches to the economy, commerce and production. The plundering of natural resources, especially in mining operations and fossil fuel extraction, lead to massive and permanent harm to the natural environment. The loss of land entails the loss of many endangered species, which are important resources for future generations. We desperately need far-sightedness to develop the sustainable future which protects our biodiversity.<sup>28</sup>

Francis calls for a new culture, a new path, and a new leadership model, capable of addressing our current challenges. He suggests that they should be fueled by a deep moral commitment, as expressed through educational campaigns, protest marches, and even acts of civil disobedience. Those who are concerned for the future of the planet and

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, 32.

its people need to achieve real, substantive political power, to that they can refocus economic policies toward sustainability, which safeguards ecosystems and promotes human dignity.<sup>29</sup>

Francis reminds us of the biblical injunction to “till and keep” the soil. Here “tilling” refers to cultivating, ploughing or working the land, while “keeping” means caring for, protecting and safeguarding it for the future. The notion of “tilling and keeping” becomes a theological ground in which a new covenant with the earth must be established. If we fail to “till” and “keep” the land, the Bible tells us that life itself will be endangered.<sup>30</sup> The urgent challenge, the call of the hour, is to protect our common home by bringing the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development.

Francis advocates a courageous new dialogue among the international, national, regional, and local communities to foster an honest, transparent spirit that can lead to a bio-centric approach to development. He hopes to create an order of love in which dignity, duty and rights are inextricably joined. *Laudato Si'* is not meant to be the last word on faith and ecology, or economic development and global awareness. It is meant to be a conversation starter, to help all humanity to embrace our common vocation to protect the earth. For the loss of land represents a threat to our very existence, and it is the root cause of much sin and exploitation in the world.<sup>31</sup>

## **5. Human Dignity and Ecology Under Threat**

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<sup>29</sup> Eban Goodstein, “Climate Change: What the World Needs Now is...Politics,” *World Watch* 19. No. 1 (January/February 2006):26.

<sup>30</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, 54-56.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

From ancient times, land has always been an integral part of man's life. Every being on earth depends on land, but the importance one attaches to it varies from person to person, from community to community, from culture to culture. For the *Adivasis*, or indigenous peoples of central and northern India, land as we saw has social, political, economic, and religious significance. They consider land to be a gift from God and the foundation of life itself. Therefore, the inheritance of land insures the survival, continuity and flourishing of the Adivasi community. They believe that land does not belong to them, rather, it is man who belongs to the land. They have learnt how to use the land in a sustainable way, without causing any permanent damage to it. They have always known the difference between their "needs" and "wants," a distinction that often eludes people of more "advanced" cultures. This clash of worldviews raises a conflict between "us" the urbanized masses and "them" the deprived and marginalized segments of the society.

For the Adivasis, land is the most precious heritage human beings and other living creatures have ever received from God. Their identity as individuals and as a community is inextricably tied to it, for it is a ground for cultural and economic flourishing. They fully depend upon the land to meet all their material needs. They also see their bond with the land as a bond with God, self and others. Hence, when they lose their land, they lose everything. Therefore, land is highly respected and even worshipped by various indigenous peoples. Some call it Mother Earth (Terra Madre, Bhomi, Dharti Ma), because it provides for all of their needs, like a loving mother. All Adivasis honor the earth and care for it as their home. They feel a deep spiritual relationship with the land, something that people living in modern industrialized countries often struggle to

understand. For the more “enlightened” ones in industrialized society, as we have seen, land is generally perceived as a commodity to be bought and sold, used and exploited.

According to John Mundu, the Adivasi reality in India has been a saga of land alienation, exploitation, displacement, and migration.<sup>32</sup> Although Adivasi land alienation began during the medieval period and intensified during the British regime, it has accelerated since the year of independence. With economic liberalization in the 1990s, vast industrial estates and Special Economic Zones have arisen, and with them, land sharks who gobble up land. Alienation of Indian land has been further facilitated by the colonial Land Acquisition Act of 1894.<sup>33</sup> The land wars have serious consequences for Indian democracy, as well as for peace and for social and ecological justice. Vandana Shiva in her book *Soil Not Oil* calls these consequences “Triple Crisis, Triple Opportunity.”<sup>34</sup> The largest democracy in the world is destroying human dignity and its democratic fabric through the land wars, even as the Constitution recognizes the rights of the people and the *Gram Sabha* (village council) to democratically decide the issues of land and development projects. The use of violence and destruction of ecosystems and livelihood that are reflected in the current trends of development are not only dangerous for the future of Indian democracy, but also exacerbate the climate change crisis and threaten to destroy the ancient Adivasi cultures.

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<sup>32</sup> John Mundu, “Adivasi Reality: A Saga of Displacement and Migration,” in *Enigma of Tribal Life and Culture*, 47-83.

<sup>33</sup> According to Land Act of 1894, the state could forcibly acquire the land from the peasants and tribals and hand it over to private agents such as real estate corporations, mining companies and industries.

<sup>34</sup> Shiva, *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Justice*, 1-7. Shiva explains how the climate chaos, peak oil and food crisis are becoming the triple crisis of the twenty first century, which is fueled by the globalization and technocratic paradigms.

In 1793, the British introduced the Zamindari System to India, to collect revenue. This only worsened the oppression of the Adivasis. Consequently, a series of Adivasi uprisings took place in the region, resulting in the promulgation of two key laws for checking the land alienation of the Adivasis: the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (commonly known as CNT Act) of 1908 and the Santal Pargana Tenancy Act (also known as SPT Act) of 1949. These are protective laws. According to the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, the Adivasi ancestral land cannot be sold or transferred to a non-Adivasi. In Chapters One and Two, I uncovered the grim realities of land alienation and uprooting, which have profoundly degraded the environment and commodified the land—the homes of many Adivasis. The British Zamindari System and its current manifestations in the MNCs, continue to spark acute dislocation and fundamentally violate human dignity and rights.

Despite efforts to curtail the loss of Adivasi lands, forced dislocation continues to take place in the name of economic “development.”<sup>35</sup> The pace has accelerated in recent years with the unprecedented rise in the number of Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) operating in tribal areas.<sup>36</sup> Many are from the extraction industries – mining and fossil fuels. They take natural resources from the land, and leave destruction and uprooted peoples in their wake. Such dislocation causes unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and psychological stress for entire communities. It also violates the human rights of the indigenous peoples at multiple levels. People are uprooted from their faith, culture, and the tradition of their ancestors. Such uprooting also breeds violence, religious intolerance

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<sup>35</sup> Shiva, *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Justice*, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Pushpanjali Satpathy and Sikhya Babu, “Report on IND Barath Land Acquisition Study,” (November 19, 2016) available from <http://www.tribaltribune.com/main.php>, accessed November 19, 2016.

and societal unrest, as the oppressed turn against the powerful and dominant elites of society, seeking justice.

The negative consequences of dislocation, however, have not deterred those intent on exploiting the land as a rich and profitable resource. As the global economy grows stronger, the land need for mining, industrial growth, urbanization, highways, and fossil fuel industries also increases. The commodification of land is fueling the corporate land grab in India, both through the creation of Special Economic Zones and through foreign direct investment in real estate.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, as the resources for globalization increase, land is emerging as a key site of conflict, as well. In India, 65 percent of the people are dependent on land and agriculture for their survival. The Charter for Land Sovereignty calls land “a sacred trust for human sustenance and long-term survival.”<sup>38</sup> It appears that the long-term survival of both the land and its people are in serious jeopardy.

The human dignity of the Adivasi people and the ecological health of their ancestral homelands are at stake in this global economic battle, yet the Indian government thus far has failed to address seriously the plight of the people or the land. In fact, the displacement of the Adivasis from their land appears to be something of a political game for the current Indian government, which seeks to uproot the indigenous peoples from Indian soil in order to establish *Ram Rajya* (the kingdom of Lord Rama). The assault on human dignity may even rise to the level of cultural, social and religious genocide of Adivasis.

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<sup>37</sup> Vandana Shiva, Shreya Jani and Sulakshana M. Fontana, *The Great Indian Land Grab* (New Delhi: Navdanya, 2011), Vii.

<sup>38</sup> Adopted at the national Conference on Land Sovereignty on August 18, 2007 organized by *Bhu Swaraj Movement*, chaired by late V.P. Singh, former Prime Minister of India and co-convened by S.P. Shukla former ambassador to GATT and Dr. Vandana Shiva, Founder Director, Navdanya.

India is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, but its brutally pragmatic approach of globalized development has set it on a dangerous pathway that is leading it to the destruction of rich Adivasi culture, the trampling of basic human rights, and the desecration of natural ecosystems. The cry of Adivasis for rootedness is the cry of the earth. The ecological destruction wrought by the MNCs and other economic players in India hurts all the people of India as it erases culture and degrades human beings. When the rights of the earth are violated, the rights of the people are likewise violated.

The protection of human dignity is a fundamental principle of modern Catholic social teaching. There are many deep affinities between the interpretation of Catholic social teaching and Adivasi ethical wisdom. The traditional Adivasi society and Catholic social teaching both regard dignity and rights as essential elements of human life. For instance, a traditional Adivasi society embraces a holistic vision of an egalitarian approach in which members of Adivasi society have a communal ownership of land and goods. They live inter-connectedly within community and with the environment. They view the environment as a sacred and dignified subject.

This holistic vision converges with the idea of *integral ecology* proposed by Pope Francis, who calls for an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time, protecting nature.<sup>39</sup> The Pope's concern for environmental protection and the dignity of the marginalized—in the case of this study, the Adivasis and their land—may be construed as a unitive moral vision which sees humans and the environment as one interdependent reality in the cosmic web of life, one

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<sup>39</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato SI': On Care for Our Common Home*, 105.

which sees all of creation as reflecting analogically the *imago dei*.<sup>40</sup> The Pope is advocating earth democracy and repudiating the ideology of eco-imperialism, which has historically violated the earth and denied human dignity and basic rights. In Chapter Four, I shall demonstrate how the prevailing caste system and Brahmin ideology amplify the violation of dignity and human rights and harm the environment and social fabric of the Adivasis.

## **6. Conclusion**

The way of bio-centrism is the path of interconnectedness, in which human dignity plays an important role in bringing about social justice. Human flourishing, the ultimate goal of natural law, is complete and meaningful when all people and all creatures have equal and unfettered access to food, health and security. Catholic Social Teaching from Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* to Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* has always maintained the protection of human dignity as its core principle. But with each successive document, the Church has gradually expanded its view of what is necessary for human beings to flourish and find fulfillment. That progression has mirrored the work of the United Nations, which first articulated a list of basic civic and political rights in 1948, then expanded the list to include economic and social justice rights, and finally moved toward ecological rights. Natural law has remained the same throughout this process of enlightenment. What has evolved is our understanding of the interconnectedness of all creation, something that has always been at the heart of Adivasi spirituality. By looking

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid; also see GC 36 document decree 1 "Companions in a Mission of Reconciliation and Justice," available at <http://www.sjweb.info/adusum/index.cfm?tab=11>, accessed on April 3, 2017.



“backward” to an ancient culture to learn its wisdom, we may just find a way forward to bring about social and ecological transformation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Brahmin Class and the Climate Crisis: A Call to Bio-diversity and Eco-Egalitarianism

In this handful of soil lies your future. Take care of soil and it will take care of you. Destroy it and it will destroy you. The civilization has been protected from destruction because so far, we have taken care of land and it has taken care of us.  
UN manifesto in the year of soil (2005)

#### Introduction

India is a country of “pops”- a “plurality of pluralities,” writes Werner Menski.<sup>1</sup> However, this plurality is fast being eroded by an oppressive uniformity. What comes to mind in the Indian context for the Western world is “Hinduism,” which immediately elicits many negative mental images of “tradition,” “religion,” or “fascism,” all of which may signify religious domination fortified by ancient fixed codes, gender-bias, and caste-based discrimination. Many people instantly identify Hinduism as a world religion that engages in multiple forms of human rights violations. The Gujarat riots of 2002, the Kandhamal riots of Orissa in 2008, and numerous other instances of vandalism against Christian churches by radical Hindus across India have served as signal events in the new millennium for many writers, scholars and the younger generation to identify Hindu nationalism, and specifically *Hindutva* (Hinduness), as the main culprit, a sure sign that Hinduism and respect for human rights are seen as irreconcilable.<sup>2</sup> Due to these kinds of incidents, Hinduism is often treated as irrational and morally questionable religion. This negative image of Hinduism has worsened under the present government-led by Narendra Modi, who promotes inequality through a *Brahmanical* monoculture that has severely divided the nation.

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<sup>1</sup> Werner Menski, “Hinduism and Human Rights,” in *Religion and Human Rights: An Introduction*, eds. John Witte and M. Christian Green (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 71.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

In this chapter, I shall discuss the problem of the caste system and critique the collusion of the Brahmin class and the MNCs, which has exacerbated the land grab from Adivasis. In reference to the foregoing chapter on natural law and Catholic social teaching, this chapter also demonstrates how the caste system in India has contributed to the violation of human dignity, basic human rights, and environmental degradation. In the first part of the chapter, I will first demonstrate how this collusion becomes a means of privatization of natural resources such as land in the name of global development. I will then show how this collusion becomes a contributing factor in global climate change. I will also demonstrate how this collusion is a new form of feudal and colonial rule that creates fear and inflicts the miseries of uprootedness and displacement.<sup>3</sup> The collusion of the Brahmin class and the MNCs in Modi's 'New India' is a current threat that is churning the land and destroying India's rich biodiversity. Sadly, the Mother Land of India is becoming a godless and prophet-less land because of the pre-dominant Brahmin ideology that loots the earth's resources and pollutes the environment.

In the second part of the chapter I shall employ a deontological approach and a social inter-connection model to forge a constructive proposal which exerts a moral claim on the Brahmin culture (the upper class of India) and the MNCs. Here my effort will include every Indian citizen, urging them to say no to any kind of development that is not humanizing and yes to those projects which protect bio-diversity and promote eco-egalitarian culture.

## **Part I**

### **The Caste System as the Problem**

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<sup>3</sup> Shrivastava and Kothari, *Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India*, 10-13.

Today, Indians stand in the middle of the changing world of globalization, economic liberalization, financial capital, ecological crisis, and free markets. Vast industrial estates and Special Economic Zones are rising, and with them, land sharks who gobble up the farming land from Adivasis.<sup>4</sup> Farmers across the country are uprooted and displaced from their ancestral lands. The government is promoting crony capitalism while neglecting the poor and vulnerable. While globalization is creating enormous potential for economic development, it is also creating new vulnerabilities and insecurities for millions of Indians living below minimum wage.<sup>5</sup> In recent years, oppression has become both a political rallying cry as well as a device to segregate Adivasis and Dalits from the mainstream.<sup>6</sup> Many Adivasi and Dalit writers argue that India will never be a new and modern society until the *Purusa-Sukata* of the *Rig Veda* is rewritten.<sup>7</sup>

The rewriting of the *Purusa-Sukta* would entail the recognition of the centrality of human dignity in Hindu society. It would promote a new way of understanding, rewriting, and interpreting the sacred texts of the *Rig Veda*. The rewriting of the *Purusa-Sukta* would also embrace a new, liberative pathway to recognizing the importance of human dignity and the common good in any model of potential economic development. We shall discuss later in this chapter how three liberative pathways of Hinduism may be unfolded to empower Adivasis who resist development projects that are dehumanizing.

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<sup>4</sup> Alexius Ekka, SJ “Jesuit Ministry among Indigenous Peoples in India” *Jesuits 2017 Yearbook of the Society of Jesuits*; [http://www.sjweb.info/resources/annuario/pdf/Annuario2017\\_en.pdf](http://www.sjweb.info/resources/annuario/pdf/Annuario2017_en.pdf), accessed on February 22, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> *Purusa-Sukta* and *Rig Veda* will be explained later in the chapter.

Therefore, the rewriting of the *Purusa-Sukta* would create a sacred space within Hindu society for Adivasis, untouchables, Dalits, and other marginal groups who do not find themselves under the umbrella of the *Purusa-Sukta*. This new hermeneutical critique of the *Purusa-Sukta* necessitates the notion of an organic and unitive vision that empowers both the Adivasis and Hindus. Thus, human dignity and basic human rights become essential for human flourishing.

The political situation does not seem to be as stable as it used to be. The current political regime is exploiting caste, religion, language and regionalism for their political gain. The late Prime Minister of India, P.V. Narasimha Rao, who spent four decades in politics, commented that Indian democracy had not been participatory, or even wholly representative. He lamented that feudalism, landlordism, and religious fundamentalism have weakened the moral fiber of Indian society.<sup>8</sup> One can go on listing many problems of India, but here I shall focus on the caste system and its ideology, which I argue contributes to the ecological crisis.

India is a country of stark contradictions and growing inequalities. It has immensely diverse customs and religious practices. One of the most popular and significant customs is the caste system which exercises a global impact on social, political, and economic systems. India has a terrible record of social asymmetry, and the caste system is only one reflection of this. A caste is an endogamous group—people who belong to a caste do not enter into a marriage alliance outside their caste. Three-fourths of Indians, cutting across caste lines, are opposed to inter-caste marriages. A caste is hereditary: one is born into it. The caste is not just a social arrangement; it is a system of

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<sup>8</sup> P.V. Narasimha Rao, *The Insider* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 206.

ideas, and the ideas of hierarchy based on age, gender, and caste lie at the core of Indian society and are sanctified by religion itself.<sup>9</sup> “Greater” and “lesser,” the two categories that are crucially antithetical to a modern ‘New Indian’ egalitarian society (purportedly embraced by Modi) are in fact embedded in the Hindu social consciousness. Every upper-caste child grows up ascribing the oppressive category of “untouchable” to the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes (Adivasis), and others who belong to the lower strata of Indian society.<sup>10</sup> This oppressive mindset perpetuates inequality, dominance over the lower castes, and endlessly selfish desires to accumulate land and natural resources at the expense of innocent people’s livelihoods. In sum and substance, the caste system has been regarded as a culture of the Brahmin class, which promotes oppression and exploitation.

#### **1.4 Belief Systems and Ideologies of Hinduism Contributing to the Problem**

Hinduism encompasses beliefs, practices, socio-religious and political cultures that comprise the Hindu religion.<sup>11</sup> The term ‘Hindu’ was introduced by the British colonizers in about 1,830 CE. It denotes the Indian civilization of the last 2,000 years, which evolved from Vedism—the religion of the Indo-European peoples who settled in India around 1500 BCE.

Hinduism integrates a variety of elements such as religious, social, economic, literary, and artistic aspects and thus constitutes a complex whole. As a religion,

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<sup>9</sup> L. Dumont, “Caste, Racism and ‘Stratification’: Reflections of a Social Anthropologist” in Andre Beteille (ed.) *Social Inequality* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), 337-361.

<sup>10</sup> James A. Tete, “Awakened and Alerted Response-Ability: A Spiritual Vision to Wholeness from Indian Perspective” (STL diss., Santa Clara University, 2008), 20-23.

<sup>11</sup> Hindus are the original Persian invaders referred to the inhabitants living on the other side of the Indus [Sindhu] River).

Hinduism is a composite of diverse doctrines, cults, and ways of life (*samprada*). The spectrum of Hindu beliefs, ritual techniques and philosophical ideologies is so immensely broad that Hinduism is considered both a civilization and a congregation of religions. Since Hinduism does not have a central authority, it operates on hierarchy and class systems (*Varna Vyavastha*).

There are four *Varnas*: *Brahmins*, a priestly class possessing spiritual supremacy by birth with special manifestations of religious power and functioning as bearers and teachers of the *Veda*, hence considered to represent the ideal of ritual purity and social prestige; *Khatriyas*, warriors who administered and protected the country; the *Vaishyas*, who were the producers, traders, artisans and craftsmen; and the *Shudras*, who performed the menial work. There were also the *cān-ālas* (the outcasts or “untouchables”—Dalits). The idea of a caste system might seem a strange idea to the Western world, but it is a reality for millions of people living in one of the largest democracies in the world.

Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, the chairman of the drafting committee of the Indian Constitution, disclosed the problem of the genesis, mechanisms, and development of the caste system in India. Ambedkar held that the problem of caste is very intricate and thus the treatment of the problem in its entirety is very difficult. The caste problem is an immeasurable one, theoretically, spiritually and ecologically. Historically, the caste system is an ancient human institution that has tremendous consequences for the health of human communities and climate change, as the Brahmin class exploits and subjects the goods of the earth and the labor of the poor to its own will and purpose.<sup>12</sup> While it is a

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<sup>12</sup> Pope John Paul II calls this the . . . “Equally worrying is *the ecological question* which accompanies the problem of consumerism and which is closely connected to it. In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way. At the root of the senseless destruction of the natural environment lies an anthropological error, which

local Indian problem, it can have a global impact if Hindus migrate from India to other parts of the world, where they can perpetuate a radical ideology of caste system in their work places.<sup>13</sup> The Indian society is a very multi-status society. Therefore, outsiders or Western corporations can take advantage of this plurality to foster division among different religions or castes.

## 1.2 Why Caste System is Problematic for a Sustainable ‘New India’

India aims, by 2030, to alleviate poverty, social exclusion, and inequality by Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>14</sup> The Indian government, which considers itself to be the fastest-growing economy of the world, is pushing through an agenda of growth and development that opens up all doors for private capital investments. Like many other countries, India considers economies, GDP rates, foreign direct investments with MNCs to be the magic mantras of development.

The class-based Indian society becomes a conducive substratum for the MNCs to establish their hubs, which exploit natural resources and threaten the survival and dignity of people living in the lower strata of society. The many forms of exploitation such as

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unfortunately is widespread in our day. Man, who discovers his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his own work, forgets that this is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are. Man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray. Instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him.”

<sup>13</sup> Valerian Rodrigues, ed., *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 242.

<sup>14</sup> Ranjan K Panda “Socially Exclusion and Inequality: Opportunities in Agenda 2030”, accessed February 23, 2017; <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/11145Social%20exclusion%20and%20Inequality-Study%20by%20GCAP%20India%20.pdf>; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are envisaged to address the inequality and crippling conditions existing in the society that put certain social groups into disadvantage and margins. It is a commitment to create a just and egalitarian society. It puts the notion of sustainable development at the center where democracy and people’s participation are the vehicles to ensure an all-inclusive society.



displacement, alienation and uprootedness from their land, deprives poor of their rights to health, food, security, jobs, education, and many other constituents of general welfare, which are basic and essential for human survival and flourishing. The displacement hinders the capacity of wounded and afflicted people to unite with other groups to resist oppressive industrial development that threatens the existence of biodiversity and human wellbeing, particularly that of the poor and vulnerable.

The MNCs take advantage of their brokenness and continue to pollute the air and poison the drinking water by dumping their waste products and residual chemicals into the water table. Industrial growth in the name of development appears as a strategy of the Brahmin culture to mask the cry of the poor and hungry person in the fields of rural India. Therefore, industrial development primarily in the indigenous rural zones of India would seem to be a strategy of the Brahmins to induce displacement of the indigenous peoples and loot their land and property, the result of which is a massive climate crisis through the loss of biodiversity, ecosystems, cultivated land and grassland. I see this as a failure of the Sustainable Development Goals, which ostensibly enshrine the protection of the excluded Adivasis. The Brahmin strategy is a way of “shadowboxing” the responsibility of the nation to care for creation.<sup>15</sup> The caste system by its ideology and doctrine of inequality promotes only a mono-culture of dominion and exploitation for profit making. However, the model of development without dignity, offered by those who see the caste system as way of development and liberation, can never be justified on any humanitarian grounds. Mono-culture is spreading its branches everywhere in India because it is patronized by the Brahmin class, who ascribe to a pragmatic ideology which

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<sup>15</sup> The term ‘shadowboxing’ is a human rights term signifying the masking of structures of injustice through various ideologies and “official” narratives of development, progress, democracy, and so forth. I explore this concept in depth below.

dehumanizes orphans, widows and strangers, as well as Adivasis and the environment. Mono-culture perpetuates the ideology of a morality of heights and not of depths. In order to foster and sustain rich and diverse cultures, India needs to devise a new strategy to dismantle the force of mono-culture.

Therefore, Aseem Shrivastava and Ashish Kothari offer *Radical Ecological Democracy* (RED), a fundamental transformation of development policies, priorities and attitudes for the Indian context, to re-structure the caste system. This framework arises from the numerous grassroots initiatives that have sprung up in India. This new paradigm affirms direct democracy, local and regional economies, cultural diversity, human well-being, and ecological resilience.

Radical Ecological Democracy is one of the sustainable and equitable alternatives to neo-liberal development, one which promotes a healthy pathway to the protection of the human dignity and basic rights of Adivasi communities and their lands from the MNCs. Mono-culture and its structures create a pattern of domination and exploitation that leads to the ecological death of both nature and humans. Radical Ecological Democracy seeks to safeguard the tribal values discussed in Chapters Two and Three and boost resistance to destructive projects that cause impoverishment, landlessness, unemployment, food insecurity, and the disruption of sacred traditions.

The cultivation of values and basic principles—hospitality and equality as over against domination and manipulation; conservation over consumerism; the satisfaction of need, not greed—is essential for the survival of our planetary home. Radical Ecological Democracy brings about a new, prophetic vision and affirms our inter-relatedness with one another and nature. However, the creation of a radical ecological democracy will face

enormous challenges from the MNCs, who stand diametrically opposed to the values of RED, though this vision engenders hope for the future. Radical Ecological Democracy will be accomplished on five levels: households/individuals, corporate/business, institutions, public policy (local, state or provincial, national, international), and the creation of new cultures and worldviews.

India can embrace RED as a new culture which opens alternative paths and new leadership fueled by deep moral commitments, educational campaigns, marches, and even civil disobedience whenever the care for creation is at stake. In order to accomplish these goals and the SDGs, we must achieve real, substantive political power that breaks the multi-status society into a single-status society and fosters sustainable growth for all, including the environment.<sup>16</sup> We cannot go on denying the fact that the planet needs intensive care due to the fact that humans have made it critically sick. Today, ecological and social problems are equally important because, as Pope Francis tells us in *Laudato Si'*, the cry of the poor is the cry of the earth.<sup>17</sup> Therefore the protection of land is the highest human vocation.<sup>18</sup>

### **1.3 Critique of the Caste System**

#### **1.3.1 Shadowboxing the Climate Crisis**

The term 'shadowboxing' is a human rights term which means covering or masking the reality of the exploitation and socio-economic exclusion of marginalized populations, in this case, the Adivasis of India. Here shadowboxing is employed as an ethical analytical

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<sup>16</sup> Eban Goodstein, "Climate Change: What the World Needs Now is...Politics," *World Watch* 19. No. 1 (January/February 2006):26.

<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, Encyclical Letter on care for our common home (Rome: The World among us Press, 2015), 49.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

tool to explore the secret relationship between MNCs and Brahmin culture. The term shows the internal logic of the MNCs and the external political dynamics of oppressive Brahmin culture, which ignore the impact of climate crisis caused by displacement. Shadowboxing also reveals how these two structures collaborate to exploit natural resources from Indian soil.

We are repeatedly told by every politician in India that we must have more growth in order to reduce or eradicate poverty. The metaphor is that the cake must get bigger for people to have a larger share, especially the poorest. However, the real beneficiaries do not seem to be the poorest but the wealthy and the Brahmins. Recently, the Indian media had done a full of analysis of the benefits of 25 years of economic liberalization.<sup>19</sup> Sadly, tribals, Dalits, and an ever-increasing number of the working poor were mere footnotes in the entire discourse. It is not surprising that their reactions to such injustice are also becoming increasingly defiant. The present model of growth is driving not only our economic paradigm, but the paradigm of how society should approach sustainable forms of eco-economics. It is generating non-sustainability, inequality and deep violence within society. Our amazing pluralism of cultures is being reduced to uniformity. The dominant culture seems to be fast swallowing up the little traditions.<sup>20</sup> Shiva elucidates the mushrooming number of MNCs, showing how the shadowboxing of the political agenda poses a serious threat to a sustainable culture. Shiva presents two different metaphors, the “Sacred Cow” and the “Sacred Car” to represent two cultures

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<sup>19</sup> Government of India, “Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas,” (Report of an Expert Group to the Planning Commission, 2008), 28; available from [http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/publications/rep\\_dce.pdf](http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/publications/rep_dce.pdf), accessed Nov 1, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Shiva, *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Justice*, 13.

competing with one another. The “Sacred Cow” represents poly-culture—biodiversity and a sustainable culture; and the “Sacred Car,” monoculture—non-sustainable, fossil-fuel, industrial culture. Shiva also shows how the Sacred Car triumphs over the Sacred Cow culture, uprooting local communities from their land, depriving them of their right to life and sustenance. The acquisition of land has violated human rights at multiple levels including the right to education, health care, job opportunities, and other basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. Metaphorically speaking, they are protecting and worshipping the “Sacred Car” over the “Sacred Cow.” Moreover, it is intriguing to see how Brahmins, who worship the “Sacred Cow” in literal terms, have resorted to slaughtering them when money and wealth are involved.<sup>21</sup>

### **1.3.2 The Protection of the “Sacred Car” over the “Sacred Cow”**

It is deeply troubling that the present governing party—the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) in the Democratic Republic of India—consists principally of Brahmins, who are influenced by fundamentalist Hindutva ideology, which claims the allegation that Brahmins belong to the governing class (though at one time they styled themselves as *Bhudevas* (Gods of Earth)).<sup>22</sup> They claim that their sacred law of humanity is not only to serve the interest of their own class, but also to safeguard the interest of all, including the earth, and to never pollute the environment. They pretend to protect the Sacred Cow over the Sacred Car.<sup>23</sup> From ancient times, there is an attitude that the person of the Brahmin is

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<sup>21</sup> Beef has become big business among the Brahmin class, with beef exports surpassing those of all other nations. <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-on-top-in-exporting-beef/article7519487.ece>, accessed February 10, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Rodrigues, *The Essential Writings of B. R. Ambedkar*, 135.

<sup>23</sup> Shiva, *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Justice*, 45-17.

sacred and could not be hanged regardless of the offence. As a sacred person, the Brahmin had immunities and privileges which were denied the servile classes (untouchables). Brahmins were entitled to the first fruits of the earth.<sup>24</sup> History also shows that the Brahmins had other classes as their allies who worked for them in subordinate co-operation. The servile classes were (and continue to be) treated as contemptible people who must never aspire to rule. Generally, Brahmins had alliances with the *Kshatriyas*, or the warrior class. These two classes ruled and ground people down—the Brahmins with their pens and the *Kshatriyas* with their swords.

### 1.3.3 The Reign of the Free Riders

At present, the Brahmins have made an alliance with the *Vaishyas*. The *Vaishyas* are commonly known as *Banias*. They deal with money transactions and many different commercial enterprises nationally and globally. It is not an exaggeration to say that in commerce, money is more important than the sword and can buy anything. At present, the *Banias*, also termed “free-riders”<sup>25</sup> are the industrialists, the multinational corporations, Monsanto India Limited (MIL) and other agribusinesses, the mining companies, such as Ratan, TATA, Mitthal, Jindal, Ambani brothers, and other private local companies, all of whom who raise funds for the political campaigns of the Modi government. Brahmin ideology and the Modi government have developed cordial alliances with the *Banias* in order to reap large profits for themselves. Earlier, Brahmins’

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<sup>24</sup> In Malabar, where the *Sambandham* marriage prevails, the servile classes such as the Nairs regard it an honor to have their female kept as mistresses by Brahmins. Even kings invited Brahmins to deflower their queens on *prima noctis*. There was also tradition when no person of servile class could take his food without drinking the water in which the toes of the Brahmins were washed.

<sup>25</sup> The term “free riders” is used for the multinational corporations (MNCs) who take advantage of natural resources of India without paying its value to the citizens. They utilize public goods without paying their fair share in taxes. The MNCs often grab the land from indigenous people and establish their industries without paying proper compensations.

relationship was strong with the *Kshatriyas*, but now there is an interesting shift in relational dynamics.<sup>26</sup> The paradigm has shifted to a *Brahmin-Bania* alliance rather than that of a *Brahmin-Kshatriya* alliance.<sup>27</sup>

I know from my experience that generally, the outlook, traditions and the social philosophy of Brahmin ideologies are to breed social exclusion and inequality among different classes, to disarm the lower classes and to prohibit their education, to ban them from occupying places of power and authority and prevent them from acquiring property. The Brahmin ideology also subjugates and oppresses women and children. The tendency and ideology of Brahmin dominion extends to nature, as they treat land as a marginal entity. Stephen M. Gardiner calls this ideology “dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.”<sup>28</sup> Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, climate justice and political ethicist, sees these problems as structural evils that violate Indian society. She raises deep theological, anthropological and sociological questions regarding the ways in which these ideologies blindfold the moral agent from seeing the moral vision. She would perhaps unmask the Brahmin ideology of an anthropocentric and non-egalitarian approach of treating natural resources as marginal entities. She argues that economic inequality devalues the human person and impedes life-furthering developments. The anthropocentrism and dominion become evil practices that cause structural violence and keep the community from a deeper understanding of how economic injustice relates to

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<sup>26</sup> A shift from sword to money in order to gobble the natural resources for profits.

<sup>27</sup> Rodrigues, *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, 139.

<sup>28</sup> Stephen M. Gardiner, Simon Caney, Dale Jamieson and Henry Shue, ed., *Climate Ethics: Essential Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010),87.

ecological injustice.<sup>29</sup> This structural violence caused by the elite classes and upper castes has given rise to many forms of resistance, notably Maoist insurgency in the tribal areas.

### **1.3.4 A Violent Cultural Resistance of the Comrades—Adivasis**

The rise of the Maoist insurgency, fomented by the tribals of central India—particularly those of Baster in Chhattisgarh against the present government—has been perceived by the upper castes as an anti-nationalist movement. In reality, however, it is a resistance movement to save life and ecology.<sup>30</sup> This resistance is against the pernicious growth projects proposed by the industrialists, corporations and mining companies on behalf of the Indian government, which are destructive of life on all levels and do not adhere to the UN index of growth.<sup>31</sup> The government does not yet have creative answers except the militarization of the state. Consequently, in 2009, the government of India announced what it called *Operation Green Hunt*, deploying twenty million paramilitary troops across central Indian states—homeland to millions of India’s tribal people and dreamland of the corporate world—against the poorest, hungriest, and most malnourished people in the world.<sup>32</sup> It was called “creating a good investment climate.” The government argued that development activities cannot take place in Naxal-infested areas without cleansing the Maoists. The Maoists (most of them tribals) were considered to be “India’s gravest internal security threat.” Slain Maoists (and other, non-political

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<sup>29</sup> Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-economic Vocation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, Press, 2013), 49-80.

<sup>30</sup> Asian Centre for Human Rights, *The Adivasis of Chhattisgarh: Victims of the Naxalite movement and Salva Judum Campaign* (New Delhi: Asian Centre for Human Rights, 2006), 12.

<sup>31</sup> See <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/education/story/india-ranks-130th-in-2015-human-development-index/1/547372.html>, accessed February 15, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> See, Arundhati Roy, “Walking With The Comrades,” *Outlook*, March 29, 2010, available at <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?264738-1>, accessed Oct 15, 2016.



Adivasis) were displayed like hunters' trophies, with their wrists and ankles lashed to bamboo poles. It was declared a "war against terrorism."<sup>33</sup>

### 1.3.5 Vitiating the *Imago Dei*

Through these death-dealing activities, the Brahman culture vitiates the reality of the image of God within the human person (*imago dei*) and denies the presence of the divine in creation, which spawns and supports life with a complexity and generosity. The fundamental claim of the Christian faith is that creation is "good" and is "life-furthering."<sup>34</sup> Even recent scientific inquiry proves that earth is the only body in our solar system and the only body of which we are aware in the universe that generates the capacity to produce and further life. Both Hinduism and Buddhism share a common vision of life lived within the great cosmic wheel of *samsara*, and both agree that the fundamental problem of life is illusion rooted in selfish desire. Therefore, selfish desire becomes the quintessential root cause of inequality and the destruction of life.<sup>35</sup>

Inequality is the official doctrine of Brahmin ideology and the free riders on which both operate to subject and suppress the lower classes. Brahmin ideologies monopolize education and declare that the acquisition of education by the lower classes is a crime punishable by cutting off the tongue or by the pouring of molten lead in the ear of the offender.<sup>36</sup> These many forms of abject inhumanity have become part and parcel of the Brahmin culture. Their greed and exploitive political motives have reflected their

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<sup>33</sup> Annie Zaidi, "Resisting the rebels", available at <http://www.Flonnet.com/fl2221/store/2005.1021006401800>, accessed January 14, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-economic Vocation*, 69.

<sup>35</sup> Darrell J. Fasching and Dell Dechant, *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 104-111.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

agenda of profit and development solely of the urban and metropolitan cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta and Chennai.

The adherence of Brahmin ideology plunder the natural resources from the indigenous states of central and north India and export them to places overseas. Thus, the indigenous land becomes barren and unproductive. Over a period of time, the government declares such barren land as “Special Economic Zones” (SEZs) and launches a mega project, for example, of manufacturing cheap cars which worsen the carbon emission. This example serves to demonstrate how land is objectified as a fungible commodity to produce not food, but cars for the middle and upper classes. They exploit land as they would have exploited a woman of the lower classes of Indian society for their self-gratification. In general, land is treated in the same way by such Brahmins as the *Kshatriyas* (who are now largely disenfranchised), the *Sudhras*, the untouchables and indigenous peoples are treated. They are often treated as parasites which are thought to prosper when there is an epidemic. The undertakers of the earth such as farmers and indigenous peoples who live in villages near forests are viewed as evil people. The caretakers of the land become as foreign as Germans are to the French, as the Jews are to the Gentiles, or as Blacks are to Whites. There is a chasm between ecological stewardship and Brahmin ideology. The ideals of justice, solidarity and freedom have vanished. Therefore, enslavement remains the only option: the Brahmin enslaves the mind and the *Bania* enslaves the earth.

However, the essentials of Hinduism, according to Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, who was a “born Socialist” and a “born Warrior,” are “a common nation (*rashtra*), a

common race (*jati*), and a common civilization (*culture*).”<sup>37</sup> Ideally, Hinduism (Hindutwa) can thus be a binding force for all Indians irrespective of their religion, caste or creed. The holistic worldview of Hinduism is organic in nature, with the potential to generate cosmic visions of charity, hospitality, love of neighbor, and an ecological conversion in which humans become protectors and tillers of the earth.<sup>38</sup> Raimon Panikkar called this spiritual energy the “Cosmotheandric intuition.”<sup>39</sup>

The eminent leftist Indian historian Dr. K.N. Panickar, asserted that Savarkar’s *six glorious epochs of Indian history* are significantly important to awaken the spirit of unity and nationalism among Indians. He further elucidated that the Hindus led a war of liberation to free their nation from the shackles of foreign domination. The six epochs are *Chanakya-Chandragupta, Pushyamitra, Vikramaditya, Yashodharma, the Marathas*, and the period when Hindus freed India from British dominion. Today, however, Hindu fundamentalism has mis-appropriated Hindu unity and its spirit of nationalism for its own political agenda, spreading its deficient form of nationalism everywhere in India. The various frontal organizations that form the part of the Hindutva force are known as *Sangh Parivar*, which comprises the VHP (*Vishwa Hindu Parisad*), BJP (*Bhartiya Janta Party*), BD (*Bajrang Dal*), and ABVP (*Akhil Vidhayartha Vishwa Parishad*) factions. India needs a cultural transition and ecological conversion to what Joanna Macy calls “mindfulness

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<sup>37</sup> Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* 116. According to Dr. Shankarsharan *Hindutva* is another name for Indian Nationalism, which includes all Indians irrespective of their caste, creed or religion.

<sup>38</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si*, 155.

<sup>39</sup> The “cosmotheandric intuition” expresses the all-embracing indissoluble union, that constitutes all of Reality: the triple dimension of reality as a whole: cosmic-divine-human. The *cosmotheandric* intuition is the undivided awareness of the totality." What Panikkar proposes is to live so open to this triple dimension of reality, open to others, to the world, and to God that we might achieve harmonious communion with the all: the *cosmotheandric reconciliation*. It is a matter of an experience more mystical and ineffable than philosophic in the traditional sense, but it breaks the customary philosophico-theological molds. The cosmotheandric dimension is another way of expressing the *radical Trinitarian* conception of reality.

and interdependence” so that the “Sacred” or “Holy” is encountered both within and outside of one’s ethnicity, political party, community and religion.<sup>40</sup> Since human beings flourish in unity, they need to strive to integrate their minds and hearts to seek common ground.

## Part II

### A Constructive Proposal to Protect Biodiversity and Build an Eco-egalitarian Society

#### 3. A Call to Unity and Sustainability

In general, Indians have always been seekers of wisdom, spirituality and truth. Indians continue to find meaning in the staggering complexity of the socio-economic, political, cultural and ecological crises that have been unleashed by globalization. Indians need to borrow the spirit and charisma of Gandhi’s *asceticism*, Thich Nhat Hanh’s *practice of mindfulness*, Abraham Heschel’s *audacity*, Martin Luther King’s *way of the cross*, and Malcolm X’s *way of pilgrimage*.<sup>41</sup> These spiritual principles mount a challenge to Hinduism to dismantle its caste system and adopt the ethic of interdependence and cross-culturality that would encourage peace, dignity, equality, and justice among religions and cultures. By following the liberative path of these great spiritual leaders, Indians can restore their broken earth-human relationship and thus India will once again become a cosmic home of religions and hospitality. This unity and spiritual convergence

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<sup>40</sup> Darrell, *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach*, 283.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 299. *Audacity* becomes a liberative path, which enlightens seekers to draw spiritual power from various religious resources and become an agent of social change. It also implies that one should open the religious door to the stranger who wants to enrich from each other’s religious traditions. Thich Nhat Hanh’s “*Socially Engaged Buddhism*” brings about a great *mindfulness* of rich biodiversity of India and its use for proper economic and spiritual growth. MLK’s lens of treating the issue of caste system is with the perspective of liberating oneself *going to the Cross*, which transforms every pilgrim. Malcom X’s approach is quite like that of MLK. All the spiritual giants plead for Hinduism to go beyond or transform its caste system and foster the ethic of interdependence and convergence of cross cultural ethics in order to protect human dignity.

will provide moral power to every Indian to resist the MNCs that promote inequality and unsustainable development.

#### 4. Sources of Ecological Vocation in India: Hindu and Christian

Indians have many other spiritual resources—funds of knowledge and wisdom that can bind and empower them to stand united despite differences in religious beliefs and ethnic moralities, to resist the MNCs. I mention two: a mono-culture of unity and the Three-fold Liberative Pathway

##### 2.1 Advaita Philosophy of non-duality

The Advaita Vedanta philosophy of non-duality can be a rich resource for revitalizing the moral and ethical consciousness of Hindu society. Sadly, in recent times, Advaita's potential contribution to ecological awareness has been vastly misunderstood. Scholars such as Eliot Deutsch, S. Cromwell Crawford, and others have argued that Advaita has encouraged attitudes of devaluation and neglect of the natural universe. The classical view of Advaita, however, has continuously been a profound source of spirituality for all Indians. In a positive relation to the interests of ecology, it has fostered values such as simplicity of life, frugality, and—for the ascetic at least—nonviolence. Advaita also has taught that the elements of the material world—cosmos, land, soil and dust—have emanated from the universal Soul: the *Brahma* (the true reality) itself. Therefore, land, soil and the entire earth have a spiritual power to give life to every being on the surface of the planet as all are part of one divine reality. Crawford calls this spiritual power the “unitive vision” of Advaita, which has always been the basis for an environmental ethics of mindfulness and hospitality for all believers of Hinduism.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Lance E. Nelson, “Reverence for Nature or the Irrelevance of Nature? Advaita Vedanta and Ecological Concern,” *Dharmaram Journal of Religions* 16, no. 3 (July-September 1991): 282-301, accessed March 17,

However, illusion and misappropriation reign when human-made, impermanent “divine objects” such as industrialization, fossil fuels, genetic engineering, MNCs and other Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emitters are perceived as real and the optimal means of development and progress. The misappropriation comes in the form of the exploitive desire to accumulate excessive natural resources regardless of who is affected adversely by such predation. This autonomous and self-centred greed militates against unity, sustainability, and the common good.

This spiritual illusion and misappropriation can be overcome by the merging of the individual soul or self with *Brahma*—true reality is achieved through deep meditation and discernment. This discernment leads the soul/self to perform a *dharma*—a duty which protects the earth and its elements. Eventually, this *dharma* becomes religious obligation and responsibility towards God, self and others—ecology with the spirit of detachment and humility prescribed in the Bhagavad-Gita:

Action without knowledge leads to bondage, but action with knowledge leads to renunciation, and renunciation leads to liberation. Because we are all living in this world we have [responsibility] to take care of our body, we have to perform action. But creative activities are done only through knowledge, not through ignorance. Creative activities are actions which lead to renunciation and not to attachment, not to bondage. When such actions lead to renunciation they will lead to liberation (Bhagavad-Gita 2:48).

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2017,

<http://www.dharmaramjournals.in/ArticleFiles/Reverence%20for%20Nature%20or%20the%20Irrelevance%20of%20Nature%20Advaita%20vedanta%20and%20Ecological%20Concern-Lance%20E.%20Nelson-July-Sept-1991.pdf>

S. Cromwell Crawford, in the conclusion of his 1982 edition of *The Evolution of Hindu Ethical Ideals*, argues that the “unitive view” of Hindu philosophy “can provide the basis for an environmental ethic.” The philosophy of Brahman, he states, supplies the one essential ingredient of an environmentally sound ethic, namely, “*reverence for nature*.” He points to the belief that *Ātman* (the true Self) is one with Brahman, the idea that all beings are separate only apparently, actually being emanations of the one Brahman. The Vedanta tradition of Hinduism with its unitive vision that “All this [world], verily, is Brahman (the Absolute)” (Chapter, U 3. 14. 1).

Willis Jenkins calls this creative activity “prophetic pragmatism” which fosters the development of practical capacities, responsibilities, and cooperation.<sup>43</sup>

In the perfect Hindu world, there is also a great notion of universalism, in which the Hindu nation is identified as the “living body of God” or *jagan mata*, *Adi sakti*, *Mahamaya*, *Mahadurga*, *Mathrubhumi*, *Dharmabhumi*, *Devabhumi* and *Mokshabhumi*. The ‘Divine Mother’ is another metaphor that is commonly used to describe India as one nation. Hindus believe that *Sakti* (spiritual power) emanated from the land and has a transformative element. These unifying principles have been attenuated in the wake of globalization, which has inflicted pseudo-sustainable and eco-imperial cultures. If the *karma yogin* performs his/her duties faithfully, *Sakti* has the creative power to build an earth democracy based on three founding principles—the self-rule, self-governance, and self-organization enunciated by Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, in his speech of the *Hind Swaraj movement* (Indian Home Rule) against the British rulers.<sup>44</sup>

According to the theory of the origin of the universe, the *Purusha*--the *cosmic Being*-- pervades the universe.<sup>45</sup> It has created humanity from different parts of its body.

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<sup>43</sup> Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice and Religious Creativity* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 9. According to Jenkins, prophetic pragmatism is an ethical approach that begins with concrete problems and adapts to changing circumstances. Jenkins believes that prophetic pragmatism is a pluralistic and non-foundationalist approach; by this he means that the world does not need common faith or worldviews to cooperate in confronting problems such as climate change.

<sup>44</sup> Shiva, *Soil Not Oil*, 129; Anthony J. Parel (ed.), *Hind Swaraj and Other Writing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 26-29.

<sup>45</sup> The *Purusa-Sukta* is the hymn written by the Brahmins which states that *brahmins* are born from the forehead of the creator, *khsatriyas* from the arm, *vaishyas* from the stomach, and *shudras* from the foot. They are called four *Varnas*—a traditional name for caste. Each *Varna* has hundreds of *jatis*, or sub-castes, who traditionally married only within their communities. The term *Dalit* is often confused within the *Varna* systems. The term *Dalit* is generic. The *Dalits* meaning “broken ones,” “trampled upon,” “oppressed,” are the “un-born.” They exit outside the body of the cosmic being. Thus, they are treated as sub-human beings. In practice, India had hundreds of untouchable sub-castes who traditionally lived separately from each other and did not intermarry.

The sacred hymn of *Purusha* reveals that the caste system originated from different parts of the one body of the *Purusha*. The Brahmins originated from the mouth, the *Kshatriya* from the arms, the *Vaishyas* from the thighs, and the *Sudras* from the feet of the *Purusha*.<sup>46</sup> Functionally, all of them are equally important and everyone has equal responsibilities. The universality and organic relation of all things which spring from a common origin can become a great impetus for unity and cosmic family (*Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*) among Indians. This organic communion should become a vital force in the struggle against the free riders, who pool natural resources from Motherland India and exploit the home of many well-known sages and saints of India who were inspired by the awesomeness of nature.

## 2.2 The Theory of the Origin and Three-fold Liberative Pathway

The three-fold *margas* (paths) of Hinduism can also become a unifying factor that can elicit motivation to protect the land from degradation. The *karma marga* (the path of duties), the *jnana marga* (the path of knowledge), and the *bhakti marga* (the path of devotion) are the true pathways that can help to mend the broken relationship between humans and the earth. They can provide spiritual and moral power to discern the future of the planet and oppose forms of development that are non-sustainable and decentralizing. The *karma marga* is to seek liberation through daily tasks such as raising a family, living in harmony with *dharma* (ethical duty). It is about being unselfish.<sup>47</sup> Through the *Jnana marga*, the follower attains true knowledge of reality and helps others to think critically

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<sup>46</sup> R. Sangeetha Rao, *Caste System in India: Myth and Reality* (New Delhi: India Publishers, 1989),49.

<sup>47</sup> *Karma marga* is the path about living in harmony with *dharma* (ethical duty), and being unselfish. The saying “Do the right thing only because it is right” is very popular in this path because it explains that a person should not be doing a good deed to be rewarded but rather one should do a good deed because it is the right thing.



about the issues of daily life.<sup>48</sup> The *bhakti marga* encourages the believer to serve God out of love expressed in every thought and deed.<sup>49</sup>

These spiritual paths can help every Indian irrespective of his/her religion, caste or clan to make a radical cultural transition that perceives current models of development and industrial growth as predatory, oppressive, and death-dealing, both to humans and the earth. The spiritual insights from the sacred scriptures such as *Rigveda*, *Bhagavad- Gita*, *Upanishads*, and *Advaita* philosophy, as well as the sacred texts from other faith traditions, and the social interactions with all classes of people, help all Indians, particularly the Brahmins who make policies and provide shelter for MNCs, to reject cultures of oppression that destroy biodiversity. They must legislate and promote decentralized power—*Gram Sabha* (village or county council), which can make decisions at the regional level and fulfil the needs of the local people. In this way, the local community and elite Brahmins learn to live together in peace and harmony.<sup>50</sup>

### **2.3 Conclusion: Building an Eco-egalitarian and Single-Status Indian Society**

The etymology of the word “Hindu,” according to Savarkar, shows that the Hindu is a person who occupied the land from the Indus to the seas as his or her fatherland. In

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<sup>48</sup> *Jnana Marga* is the path of knowledge for philosophical or intellectual types. Followers of this path must devote a great deal of time to learning and meditation. This path is usually followed by members of the Brahmin caste. Jnana Marga focuses on attaining knowledge over ignorance; knowledge of the true nature of reality. To obtain knowledge of Brahma, followers study the three schools of Hindu philosophy: Vedanta, Sankhya, and Yoga. The path of Jnana Marga is the shortest but steepest journey to liberation; it is a profound spiritual journey.

<sup>49</sup> In *bhakti marga*, the deity reveals itself to the person who praises it. It helps him/her, shows itself to him/her in images, in mental visions, and in all beings. Love for God prompts service of God, which should find expression in every thought and deed. A devout Bhakti-Hindu should thus pursue and serve God. The Bhagavad-Gita encourages this through the discourses of Lord Krishna to Arjuna. By doing everything out of love of God, the believer purifies every action and receives full understanding of God. Thus, the believer, regardless of caste, class, or sex, can reach Moksha (liberation). Accessed on March 17, 2017; <http://aguidetohinduism.blogspot.com/2012/01/three-paths-of-liberation-8.html>.

<sup>50</sup> John Witte and M. Christian Green, eds. *Religion and Human Rights: An Introduction*, 83.

principle, every Hindu was supposed to consider this land as his or her Holy land because it was the “cradle of Hindu religion.”<sup>51</sup> Savarkar further disclosed how all the people who inhabited this holy land, which extended from Kashmir in the north to Rameswaram in the south, needed to worship their ancestor land and protect it from free riders.<sup>52</sup> In principle, this land was supposed to be the land of harmony, brotherhood, and hospitality; a land of equality and tranquility among the inhabitants.

An attempt to transform Hindu society into a caste-less society—a single-status society—will be a revolutionary step because in this society all members will have to share equal social and economic status allocated solely based on their merits and abilities.<sup>53</sup>

This re-structuring will destroy the existing Brahmanical social order, unmask the Hindu ideology of dominion, and show how Brahmins treat land only as fungible means of income. This will remind Brahmins that with higher privileges there are always higher responsibilities—here the higher responsibilities are to protect the environment and advocate for the lower-castes. Savarkar calls this a “new social paradigm”—the integral humanism in which the elite Brahmins accept a less material way of life, with less waste, in order to avoid the destruction of the earth. They are obliged by absolute justice to share the natural resources equally with all other members of the human race.<sup>54</sup> Savarkar deeply believes that the dream of a class-less Hindu society and unity of mind and heart,

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<sup>51</sup> Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* (Mumbai: Veer Savarkar Prakashan, 1969), 1-39.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Y. G. Bhave, *Vinayak Damodar Savarkar: The Much-Maligned and Misunderstood Revolutionary and Freedom Fighter* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2009), 23.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

will boost moral agency to bring about social, political, economic, and ecological justice. To achieve this dream, Savarkar proposes to have a single-minded devotion to the welfare of Mother Earth by affirming *the six glorious epochs* of India that bind all Indians together, in order to resist the free riders.

Then we can once again sing the national anthem, *Bande Mataram* (I revere the Mother) in one voice with honor and pride. If we do this, the words of Rabindranath Tagore, in his 1922 essay, “The Robbery of the Soil,” will be meaningful:

Most of us who try to deal with the problem of poverty think only of a more intensive effort of production. We forget that it brings about a greater exhaustion of material as well as of humanity. It gives to the few excessive opportunities for profit at the cost of the many. It is food which nourishes, not money; it is fullness of life which makes one happy, not fullness of purse. Multiplying material wealth alone intensifies the inequality between those who have and those who have not, and it inflicts so deep a wound on the social system that the whole body eventually bleeds to death.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: A Miscellany*, ed. Sisir Kumar Das (New Delhi: Sahitya Academi, 1994), 872.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

John Donahue states that the harvest of peace is not possible in uprootedness, but only in *rootage* and grounding in one's faith and religious traditions. To this I would add that ultimately, peace is not possible without sustainable development, ecological justice, and the right of indigenous peoples to remain in their lands. This project began with a description of the grim historical reality of the uprootedness of Adivasis in India and argued that the power of the memory of Adivasi uprootedness and dislocation places demands on all people of good will to stand in solidarity with Adivasis in their struggles for integral salvation, which includes a sustainable future in their own sacred lands, and development with dignity.

Adivasis have been affected by land grab and land alienation for centuries, but now this injustice has drawn new scrutiny because of rising consciousness of the need for the protection of ecological biodiversity. For decades, land alienation has not only violated the dignity of Adivasis, but also the other, non-human species on the planet and the land itself. The social, cultural, political, and religious identities of Adivasis are being rapidly swallowed up by the present-day dominant multi-national corporations, who find their shelter under the wings of the Brahmin ideology.

Seventy years of planned economy has not benefitted all the citizens of India at the same level. Rather, it has elevated some to the peak of riches and sunk others, notably Adivasis, into the pool of poverty and misery. Under the current neo-liberal economic model, industrialization, notably in the form of the MNCs, has precipitated injustice, death, denial of rights, dispossession and displacement, violation of human dignity, and environmental ruin rather than bringing about sustainable development for all citizens of

India. Instead, these injustices have emerged as the foundations of tribal unrest in central India.

The current dominant economic development model, going under the various ideological slogans of ‘New India’, ‘Make it in India,’ and ‘Shine in India’, has not become a structure of true prosperity and flourishing because it has violated the rights of socially marginalized Adivasis. This model has triggered ethnic violence and religious intolerance. The earth is being plundered, ravaged and destroyed by land-grabbing behemoths.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Indians are becoming conscious that human activity—whether economic, political or social—also has ecological consequences. It is not just a matter of sharing the natural resources of Mother Earth; it is a matter of preserving the very environment which makes it possible for humankind to survive on this planet. If we continue to destroy the planet’s atmosphere at the present rate, it will not be long before we destroy humankind itself.

The capacity to live the kinds of lives we value—and have reason to value—depends, at the most primal level, on the nature and robustness of the environment. Hence, the Adivasis are battling every day to protect forests, mountains, and rivers because they know that these natural resources in their turn protect the Adivasis. Maintaining rapid as well as environmentally sustainable growth remains an important and achievable goal for India. At the heart of this vision lies a profound reverence for the nature that sustains life and connects us all as living beings.

Both Hinduism and Buddhism share a vision of life as lived within the great cosmic wheel of *samsara*, and both proclaim that the fundamental problem of life is

illusion rooted in selfish desire. Indeed there is truth in the statement that selfish desire divides and separates one being from another. In the case of modern India, the fundamental human problems of old age, sickness and death are compounded by globalized development and urbanization. Greed and violence result in massive violations of human rights, under the pretext of economic development and security. These violations in turn beget more violence and upheaval in the society, thus destroying the harmony and interdependence of the cosmic order.

The way of bio-centrism is the path of interconnectedness, in which human dignity plays an important role in bringing about social justice. Human flourishing, the ultimate goal of natural law, is complete and meaningful when all people and all creatures have equal and unfettered access to food, health and security. Catholic Social Teaching, from Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* to Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*, has always maintained the protection of human dignity as its core principle. But with each successive document, the Church has gradually expanded its view of what is necessary for human beings to flourish and find fulfillment. Our current moment reflects an evolution in our understanding of the interconnectedness of all creation, something that has always been at the heart of Adivasi spirituality. By looking "backward" to an ancient culture to learn its wisdom, we may just find a way forward to bring about social and ecological transformation.

Living in harmony with nature and keeping their needs to a minimum, the Adivasi communities proclaim the message that the earth is the Lord's, and thus it should not be used indiscriminately to satisfy human avarice. They register a powerful protest against a wasteful lifestyle devoid of any sense of responsibility to the world of nature. They send

a strong message to the Western world—criticizing its throw-away culture, and showing that radical ecological democracy is an alternative path to inclusive and sustainable development. This path becomes an alternative vehicle of liberation that safeguards land and protects indigenous rights, treating even the poorest as global citizens who have equal dignity and privileges. How ironic that those whom Indian society considers the most “backward” may show us the way forward to true and lasting prosperity.

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