COMMUNITY DIALOGUE: Towards an Organic Tribal/Adivasi Theory

Tribal Intellectual Collective India

adivaani

This short frame is laid for the benefit of members to reflect, contest, reformulate, refine and further enrich. After members have deepened the framework through reflexive shared engagements, the contents of the conversations will be made public. This note is designed to elicit our reflections and allow us to think more deeply about our socio-political conditions from a pan tribal/adivasi perspective. It seeks to engage our powers of reason as we join a collective project of working out what is the most insightful, appropriate, incisive and relevant theory about our realities emanating from perspectives from within. You could respond directly to the content of the note or you could engage on the reflections of others on the note. Please refrain from using language that is demeaning, disrespectful and non-dialogical.

INITIAL FRAMEWORK:

Two realities we need to problematise as a collective

i) The overarching dominant theoretical framework subsuming tribal studies that are layered into our realities emanating from historical waves of colonisation

ii) The dominance of european and caste epistemologies over tribal epistemology in the domain of knowledge production

Two contexts we need to scrutinise as a collective

- i) The loss of knowledge related to land, water, forest, agriculture, livelihoods and language
- ii) The inability of tribal academics to further knowledges of tribes and gain socio political legitimacy for the same

Two questions we need to answer as a collective

- i) What is tribal epistemology/adivasi epistemologycan it be unravelled
- ii) Can we produce knowledge that is emancipatory for tribal and adivasi realities

COMMUNITY REFLECTIONS:

R. R. Ziipao (Mr): Reflecting on the above framework, I am of the opinion that there are two fundamental questions that tribal academics are faced with in contemporary times. One; subsumption by overarching theoretical frameworks emanating from historical waves of colonialism and two; a poverty in available theory that comprehends and explains sources of conflicts in tribal realties. To each of these questions tribal academics have tried varied ways in

either reconciling with or contesting them. Those within the domain of philosophy have formulated a distinct tribal philosophy plus challenging dominant methodological processes of knowledge production. Those within history have written tribal histories or peoples' histories challenging various dominant historiographies. Those in the social sciences have carved out a distinct knowledge domain in the form of tribal studies together with the problematization of framework/s emerging from western and dominant caste location/s. In the light of these contributions how do we position ourselves in the knowledge production process?

A. Akhup (Mr): We should extend the discussion on philosophy and epistemology to the domain or realm of value and ethics, inclusive of ethical standards of research.

R. Tadu (Ms): As we proceed, I think there is a need for a better and critical understanding of existing knowledge domain and their epistemological queries. We are good at framing and pitching against colonial discourses. However, we need to understand that most of the time such framework of critique are very often borrowed from nationalist and other power-centric discourses, which are equally damaging and limiting for generation of our own interpretations, enquiries, articulation and emancipation. I had great difficulty while doing my readings on tribal history and searching for a methodological framework to represent local history (of a traditional, oral and tribal community). Many times I was routed to Subaltern history approaches and its writings. Not that I disagree with what

they are doing but it became more and more clear how my project cannot be justified under subaltern history writing framework, so much so that at one point I was about to write a paper on 'To be or not To be Subaltern' (it is collecting dust now). An article written by Bhangya Bhukhya for JTICI (Journal of Tribal Intellectual Collective India) is important and timely. I might not need to discuss in detail how nationalist and 'non-tribal' interpretations can influence our own understanding of our reality. Just a suggestion to the core team-please include all forms of knowledge production and knowledge under scrutiny rather than focussing only on colonial critiques. We might need to start fresh or formulate some hybrid framework, nonetheless we need a form which can help in expressing our thoughts and feelings as clearly as possible without any fear of their acceptance within dominant academia. Maybe right now we are not ready for theorizing anything but those who could show the way can begin now.

V. Narzary (Mr): Would it be possible for us to also consider a threadbare discussion on 'tribal praxis'?

S. Chakma (Mr): To get into 'Tribal Praxis', I believe we have to engage with epistemology to the extent that we are able to bring and unravel the reality both within structuralist and post structuralist perspectives. In such a case we can adopt neither the methodology of caste framework (from every single location of the caste hierarchy) nor colonial but the reality that suits the tribal context much more. If we go with the Dalit perspectives/framework of analysing we may have to deal with the questions of race and racism. This is

seen as manifested in western theorists articulations related to social or cultural evolution theory to describe 'other' society or race. At the same time we can't adopt frameworks that advocate and justify the human-nature relationships or culture per se because there is embedded in this conception a caste-power relationship. Also we need to restraint from analysing the problems with tribal conceptions based on sourcing or tracing culture from ecological orientations.

B. S. Ranee (Mr): Let me summarise the discussion on this thread as of today. Based on some of the above discussions I think there are a few concepts we need to reflect as a group: (i) what do we mean by colonisation or colonialism and what are we referring to when we say 'waves of colonialism' ... (ii) what is epistemology and what are we referring to when we say community/ tribal epistemology contrasted to epistemology of the dominant ... (iii) what is 'location' and 'history'. When we say our location or the writing of our history, what are we referring to ... (iv) what is 'tribal praxis' and how do we conceive the idea of a tribal praxis (v) what are caste based conceptions of tribal societies and how have they become an impediment or problem for producing information or knowledge about tribal societies ... (vi) what concepts restrict the correct interpretation of our societies-for instance are concepts like subaltern, proletariat, peasant, excluded, backward, etc helping or distorting the correct representation and understanding of our societies ... (vii) when we refer to ethics and value as fundamental to our goals of research, plus the same being a forward movement from philosophy and epistemology within research

methods, what theoretical demands does this trajectory make on our understanding of methodology?...(viii) there are many very dominant frames like 'structuralist', 'post-structuralist', 'neo-colonial' 'post-colonial' in which information and knowledge of tribal societies are being produced, are these frameworks empowering, freeing, emancipating or imprisoning, humiliating, disempowering and distorting our conception of our own societies ... (ix) what is 'colonial', 'marxist', 'nationalist' or 'liberal' histories and how do they represent our societies or in other wordshow do they write about us... Add more questions and we could all try to clarify this together.

M. D. Gergan (Ms): This is such an important initiative and I am very excited and honoured to be a part of this collective! I've really enjoyed reading all of your comments and suggestions and I have a few scattered thoughts (for now). The role of corporate capitalism (the most recent wave of colonialism) and how it subordinates our politics, culture and stories, is crucial to our analysis. In the Indian context, corporate capitalism mixed with right wing policies pervades most institutionalized spaces. Public universities and development organization are being increasingly privatized (as well as Hinduized) and for many of us this is the sphere of our daily struggle as educators and activists. While the Marxist analysis has been critiqued for not being sensitive to the question of tribe, caste and race, it is a very powerful framework. Very often, extractive industries and large infrastructural development are welcomed into the state by the tribal elite, so the Marxist class analysis is really pertinent here. (Ok, more on this later). Might we also consider broadening our scope to include examples of tribal scholars from Latin American and Native American contexts (the two I am familiar with)? These scholars have been quite successful in developing their own theories while challenging dominant Western and Christian narratives. While the history and context is quite different however we might be surprised by the commonalities in strategies of both oppression and resistance. Also, has there been a push back against the term 'indigenous'? It might help resolve the tension between adivasi and tribe (though it is itself a loaded term).

S. K. Pradhan (Mr): Thanks for the wonderful and insightful comments and thoughts plus very relevant questions. I am of the opinion that we need to document unique models of socio-economic development and culturo-political frameworks of processes that could be considered emancipatory (we could discuss the notion of 'emancipatory' threadbare in our congress), plus aspirations of tribal youth.

A. Ekka (Mr): I am extremely overwhelmed by the powerful epistemological engagements of this initiative. It feels really great to be part of the exciting range and domain of ideas and concerns as put forward here till now. While trying to construct an autonomous field of knowledge production we do not find ourselves immune to an immense diversity of conceptualisation of contested vocabularies and imageries. It thus becomes important to develop our lines of thought along with the existing knowledge in a manner of informed acceptance (or negation of the

existing or imposed knowledge) as the case may be. In sync and agreement to the above ideas proposed, it would also be interesting to enter the realm of 'political and legal aesthetics of tribes'. Contemporary politics of visual representation of tribes would also be an interesting site of study. In the same context the idea of a tribal public sphere, limitations and misappropriation of tribes within the framework of media plus communication and law would require us to consider new forms of exclusion. Politics of justice, governmentality, symbolism, legal communication, tribal vocabulary and myth studies have to be recreated within a new framework. The politics of technology and legal politics is a new field for tribal aspirations which need value additions. Feminist methodologies have been targeting tribal studies for lack of proper methodological approach which is a serious academic concern for the kind of tribal studies we envision as a group. Further, contemporary post-modern approach to tribal studies imposes serious concerns to it. The approaches of new disciplines like Development studies or Peace and conflict studies to tribal studies have to be critically seen as they might obscure tribal conceptualisations taking it purely in terms of development deficit or violence. Nonetheless I believe that its only a matter of time that this process of knowledge production and intellectual thought takes a giant leap.

J. Minz (Mr): A very well thought out charter of actions has been presented above...I couldn't have agreed more...just want to add on...that apart from exploring and bringing forth a new discourse on tribal epistemology...we

can make use of the immense amount of statistical data (govt. or non govt.) that is available in the public domain... issues concerning rapidly changing technological frontiers that may subvert forces of displacement caused by large scale mining and other activities (indirectly relating to the positioning of tribals in today's development initiatives), disintegrated study of particular tribal groups so as to get a nuanced understanding of them particularly on the pretext of differences in terms of place of origin, religion, etc, that in turn would shape their respective realities... having one approach to any particular tribe itself would be homogenising...and we then tend to fall trap to existing colonial constructs and epistemology...all in all the problem at hand is one of methodology also...in this way I think we would be politically more well placed also...another issue which does not relate to the concept note as such but concerns the formation of such a group as TICI is that we need to have proper roadmaps as to where we position ourselves in few years from now...that would make us more motivated towards reaching and realising our goals.

A. Akhup (Mr): I am really impressed with the thought processes being articulated. It gives me hope seeing the depth of discussions and analysis being made by members. Let me also flag one more aspect of the knowledge building processes when it comes to our context. In this thinking, our epistemological standpoint should take into consideration the lived experiences (diversity at the empirical level). Therefore, an epistemological engagement from this backdrop makes a fundamental departure from the westphalian perspective. In such a project, it becomes

extremely important to lay out a framework of abstraction, conceptualization, categorization and even theorization founded on empirical bases. This framework should be able to engage with the dynamic reality, rendered more complex when seen from the colonial perspective. There should be a conscious attempt to critique the Platonic processes of conceptualization, binary ordering of capital and totalizing processes of the state. In concrete terms and the lived, we have to encounter categories such as tribes, scheduled tribe, adivasi, indigenous and in fact, also at the level of ethnicity and religion etc. At one level these will require a historicopolitical revisit of such conceptualizations and at the second level-the lived engagement with empirical, the lived reality, differences and diversity. Within this backdrop, a clear understanding and stand on epistemology will carefully draw its boundary, a boundary of dynamicity and will move beyond functional, structural and post structural theoretical impositions. The foundation of a stress on uniqueness lies in the way we engage with shared experiences-taking into consideration the principle of survival, lived differences and the plurality of ethics and values.

J. P. Lakra (Mr): The problem with tribal/Adivasi studies is that it gets locked between Marxists/Nationalist/Right Wings (in other words religious affiliation). We are influenced by one of the three lines of thoughts, and at times by all of them. At times our process of the production of knowledge seems to merely prefer one line of thought over the other. Tribal/Adivasi epistemology to begin with, primarily demands a critical view of Marxists/Nationalist/Right Wing understanding of tribes/Adivasis and then

we can go ahead formulating our own epistemology. Tribal/Adivasi epistemology would mean a completely different way of producing knowledge and even looking at tribes/Adivasis, in which we need to construct our own categories and concepts. We will always fall trap to already existing ways when we use borrowed concepts from outside. We need to be extremely sharp in locating contemporary theoretical debates on tribes/Adivasi in India with emerging articulations from Australia, America, SE Asia, Australia etc. plus critically analyse the same. We have already started the process which will gradually take shape through more serious sharing and discussions within people committed to knowledge production.

M. Mochahari (Mr): In overview of the conceptual framework for the Collective, I feel it is essential for me to bring my lived experiences into the proper context. I belong to Bodoland, a region which has been witnessing political unrest for several decades. I have witnessed this phenomenon since my early childhood. The recurring strife continues to take its toll, both in economic and humanitarian terms, while political dialogue and reconciliation eludes the Bodo heartland. The human cost of the struggle has been huge, traumatic, painful and at times unimaginable. In absence of pragmatic political solutions, the political aspirations of the community fail to subside even today and the region continues to be stigmatised as a troubled periphery. While this reflects a sad political history in Assam politics, what is equally disturbing are the competing narratives generated on issues related to the people and the region. The region remains a fertile ground

for academic understanding. From across the globe, academicians and researchers have descended from across the country and abroad to Bodoland either to investigate or fulfil their academic interests on issues confronting the region. However this process has only created a huge room for subjective misinterpretation and selective silence on the issue itself. Inability of Bodo intellectuals, and tribal academia to produce proper perspectives have accelerated the production of unhealthy academic discourse in nontribal academic clubs. Mostly issues such as militancy, ethnic violence, and violent claim for territory get prominence in academic deliberation and the conclusive remarks made out of these issues have been somewhat unwanted. For instance, the entire Bodo community is branded as-militant. Even terms such as 'ethnic cleansing, Bodo terrorism, Bodo violence, Bodo and Non-Bodos,' among others have been used to give a different frame to the entire issue which either directly or indirectly creates feelings of anxiety and enmity. While fringe elements do exist in the Bodo community, nonetheless, factors that gave rise to the Bodo agitation are often overlooked while arriving at inferences. The heroes, the histories and particularly the postcolonial situations, including socioeconomic exploitation, linguistic hegemony and political marginalisation that lay the foundation of the agitation even today remain outside proper scientific enquiry. Even national issues such as illegal immigration and its impact in Bodoland are yet to be explored. Similarly, the problems of land alienation among Bodos, illiteracy, economic backwardness, denial of democratic rights, among other issues need proper academic discourse and deliberations.

D. Leo (Mr): I am overwhelmed by the rich discussions and very distinct organic discourses being articulated by members. However, I opine that if we could break down our charter of actions into specific subject domains; say we pick up any one of the themes as positioned in the note and each take the responsibility to flesh out perspectives on the subject from our own community locations and discuss threadbare in our Congress, this I think would be a great beginning. From my understanding, I consider such a process important based on my own experience in engaging with my own research, which is based on the concept and notion of land, sourced from an indigenous tribal people's perspective. As I proceeded into my research process, it dawned on me the diabolical dilemma I encounter as a researcher researching on the said theme. The materiality and economic aspects of land have penetrated so deep into the categories that makes our social world that there is emerging a brutal criminalisation of customary forms of land and usage of natural resources, particularly in the contexts of conservation and areas under protection. We are entering a phase where we are being conceptually divorced from our intrinsic connect to our lands, making us strangers in our own habitat. As Indigenous tribal peoples, we are deeply rooted in our culture and history which is embedded in our traditional lands and territories, plus land being the foundation of our narratives in which we construct our spiritual, physical, social and cultural world. Needless to say that when our identity and spirituality, which constitutes the core part of our human'ness' is forcibly and violently snatched away from us, the question of 'who am I' or 'who are we' becomes

my own conundrum. Therefore, I think it is pertinent to reclaim the loss of knowledge related to land, water and livelihood and I believe that reclaiming such knowledges would be an engagement towards emancipation for our tribal/adivasi(hood) or (ness).

M. Dadode (Mr): I would like to add onto the above discussion in relation to experiences from the western part of India. I think the modern capitalist economy is forcing us in varied ways to conceive ourselves as individuals. This framework is soaked in individualistic conceptions and thereby fundamentally degrading to Adivasi values which is more community centric. In this context a question arises: What is Adivasihood and how do we experience and know it?'. For any commoner, I guess it comes naturally to understand that it is in following Adivasi values and its manifestation in day to day life that Adivasi 'hood' or adivasi'ness' is defined and experienced. Following from this, what is the Adivasi reality in the light of this frame? In Western parts of India, Adivasi populated areas are facing a dilemma about development in contemporary era, as in 'development of what'. This is much more real especially among the adivasi youth. Adivasi reality in this region of India is heavily influenced by colonization/capitalism (e.g. Forest Rights Act), non-adivasi lifestyle which includes 'backward' hinduization or Christianisation by missionaries, Government of India's Panchsheel approach (basically a system which follows colonial legacy), leftist movement which forcibly tries to impose their analysis and insert their worldviews into traditional adivasi lifeworlds and its embedded values and practices and also Nongovernmental organizations that focuses on 'outcome' oriented social work led by elite, urbanised non-adivasis. All these processes distort adivasi realities and history in many ways. Adivasi reality has its own language, values and myth (each playing a particular role in its cosmology). But today, adivasi population is struggling to conserve Adivasi reality and practices because it is suppressed by dominant socio-economic and political systems. Lots of people are contributing and investing efforts to sustain Adivasihood. This could be conserving indigenous farming style, using indigenous language in day to day life or even transferring indigenous values to the next generation. In the light of these, it is needed to reconceptualise 'Adivasihood' and 'Adivasiness' by adivasi population themselves to 'contest' the modern capitalist economic order.

K. T. Ekka (Ms): The basic difference between western philosophy and tribal philosophy pertains to the definition of knowledge itself. Tribal epistemology is gained from experience and is perpetually dynamic. That means it keeps on changing with no definite arrival at any real or true knowledge. Tribal knowledge is generally formulated based on organic experience and always in relation and in consonance with everything which exists in the immediate surroundings. The problem with western philosophy on the other hand is that it is more inclined towards sceptical attitude, proceeding by arriving at knowledge through the process of clearing doubts and problems. Each of these processes I believe is very different from each other. Further I also think we need to look at how we are caught by the term and framework of post-colonial and the

knowledge produced within such writings. I think even in the 'post-colonial' period we still follow colonial ways of writing. Meaning while context and forms have changed, yet the content remains the same as we recycle the same categories and concepts produced by western theory.

R. Lunkhopao (Mr): In the pursuit of unravelling perspectives from below, one faces dichotomies framed around an individual centric western European mindset and a lived experience based on community life. For example, the presentation of tribes as Primitive against the Civilized Colonial anthropologist represents the denial of coevalness of the tribes. These dichotomies are a major hindrance to finding the rich narratives that contributes in articulating and redefining the tribal discourse today. A more succinct and concise description based on the lived realities of tribal discourse which is not driven by impulses and emotions will allow us to change the discourse from dominant perception to understanding grounded sociopolitico and economic realities. One way to challenge the dominant discourse is to translate tribal tradition as 'way of life' to a 'way of thinking' and to drive this process towards emancipation based on an organic form of rationality with struggles to universalize the same. Tribal discourse today is at the crossroads. Tracing the past to the present political conditions, the historical experiences over a period of time has been reduced and distorted by forces external to tribal worldview. In the pursuit of a critical engagement on tribes, the challenge ahead lies in constructing, deconstructing, confronting and reconstructing reflexively.

S. Chakma (Mr): The debate between Individuality and Communality has to probably be explained from a more empirical vis-a-vis theoretical orientation. If we are unable to critically understand and differentiate these two terms, then we will fall trap and be boxed into being 'communal' or 'communalism per se'. There are those who have attempted to explore the subject by demystifying communitarian and individual land rights of 'Jhum' cultivation. In my perspective, I even think that the concept of individuality is very strong among the tribes themselves (we can see strong individual freedom and rights among the tribes unlike other communities) but we fail to comprehend it fully and at times even misunderstand it.

L. Haokip (Mr): The importance of religion in shaping our worldview. Differences between our present worldview varies from the world view of our progenitors, if there be any. If British colonization produced different political and economic landscapes and identities, has Christianity produced colonization of the mind? I believe these are important areas that should be confronted theoretically by the group plus themes framed around these could be further explored.

B. Tripura (Mr): I have undoubtedly enjoyed all the above comments and see great worth in the kind of knowledge we are generating from our lived experience. Plus the value/s being adhered to is heart warming. In this context I strongly opine that ours is to articulate the practices that arise out of the specificities of epistemology and methodology rooted in survival struggles. While

accommodating the voice of the voiceless we also need to prevent the dying of people's cultures, stories, narrative, memories, of ecosystems, etc. Putting forward our contextual histories, politics and cultural consideration that are respectfully interwoven together; further demolishing the oppressive legacy and presenting the counter-stories in the form of layers of resistance, plus reclaiming emancipatory/transformatory processes through 'writing back' or 'talking back' or 'telling back', we need to articulate, represent and complete the unfinished business of decolonisation.

R. R. Ziipao (Mr): The Tribal Intellectual Collective India also needs to discuss threadbare and formulate some ethical research guidelines for its members while engaging in knowledge production, either with one's own community or with various other tribal communities. The concept of an ethical standard set forth and laid by a Collective such as ours for its own members will mark us out as different from other dominant methodologies of knowledge production. These ethical guidelines must be articulated and debated openly among the community of Tribal academics in the light of an extremely unethical and negative implication of colonial anthropology and now Caste located Indian anthropology on tribal communities across the world and especially in India. Both colonial and caste based Indian anthropology has continued unabated, unhindered and unchallenged by tribes who are historically experiencing the repercussions of colonial methodologies plus are having to face the brunt of their highly problematic knowledge production processes. I also

believe that the issue of 'ethics of knowledge production' should be factored into the very vision of our collective. I also propose that all of us writing on the subject should state upfront our own locations so as to counter the notion of objectivity and neutrality which we observed in writings of most upper caste anthropologists who assume that knowledge production is free from location or is not determined by one's location; as in free from a methodological/emprical bias. To me, this is nothing but a project of rule and a way to subjugate a community/reality within one's framework for gaining power.

V. Vaditya (Mr): Our goal should be the reclamation of subjugated knowledge through emancipatory research practices, which are inclusive of a variety of research methodologies. I think we should dedicate one of our gatherings to discuss exclusively about challenging our epistemic marginalization with emancipation as our objective. The ontological epistemological assumptions of these varied non-European methodologies should end the silence and injustice of people who live at the margins of the mainstream society. The absence of such voices is stark, significant and disturbing. Let there be an epistemic disobedience, to decolonise ourselves i.e. from both enlightenment epistemology and dominant epistemology in our own contexts which are methodologically grounded on premises of the dominant such as Hindutva, Marxism, Gandhism etc. Let the group also partake in epistemic creativity, which is an important way to challenge dominant and normative epistemic assumptions. In the process, I think there is possibility to make sense and unravel our

own epistemology, which could be fluid, non-linear, and relational. In India, indological reality, which is dominant, is textual and ideological i.e. a varna based conception operationalised on diverse societies. We must realize that at least in mainland India there is a religio-material onslaught on tribes/Adivasis to assimilate and lock them into the caste framework. This in my opinion is the main existential threat that adivasis as cultural communities are facing from the dominant brahamanical social structure.

R. Kamei (Mr): In addition to various challenges, indigenous people face, I want to highlight a particular context when external elements are introduced into indigenous communities. The inroads of externality into indigenous world always takes a position of assimilation. The 'saviour complex' in people from the outside when they intersect with indigenous people only strips off the choices of Indigenous people, and reduces them as people who are incapable of making decisions on their own. Such processes lead to orientation of the existing structure in accommodating external elements, and place them as the sole proprietor of indigenous people and their resources. This marks the beginning of the portrayal of the indigenous people as the 'other' and subsumed them as subordinated subject. Space for dialogue and negotiation is being taken away from the indigenous community, and is being legitimised where the authority for it resides with the State.

In furtherance to this discourse, when political economy is introduced into an indigenous community, the perceived opportunity it offers always favours

one community over the other. This ends up creating a hierarchy within a geographical space where many ethnic groups have a shared history, culture and territory. This creates division on the lines of socio-politico and economic realms. An outcome of this leads to the creation of unequal power relations over community resources including lands and forest; then insecurity and tension fills into the void of unequal power relations which eventually emboldens the role of the State for its interest.

The State with powers and authority residing with them, should acknowledge the concerns, aspirations and experiences of indigenous community, and take them on equal footing with the agencies of neoliberalism and dominant socio-cultural forces. Regarding the role of academicians from indigenous communities, there is a need to bring out narratives, and define our worldviews, history, and experiences. An active engagement and deliberation among academicians from indigenous people should be thrust upon by taking into account issues concerning our land, forest, resources, culture, tradition, feminism, sexual identity, religion etc., and build a platform where we can stand on our own, and interact with the world outside of indigenous societies.

A. Poyam (Mr): I think the various opinions sum up most issues that we come across as scholars of social sciences. Along with whatever has been mentioned above, in my personal view, within Adivasi studies there is dire need of engagement with caste epistemology as well. Nearly 100 years of Hinduisation among Central Indian tribes has distorted their realities so deeply that many

of us find it difficult to articulate our being, identify our own culture and make sense of our own social realities. Along with academic/theoretical engagement, Anti-caste, anti-Brahminical literatures from an Adivasi point of view would definitely help us clarify our own sense of what emancipation entails. At the same time, the appropriation of Ambedkar by reactionary right wing forces has positioned Ambedkar and his contextualized opinion on Adivasis/Tribals in such a manner as to pitch us against the liberatory and democratic movement spearheaded by Dalits. So I think we need more conceptual and theoretical clarity on how we engage and position Ambedkar vis-à-vis Adivasi societies. At the same time, how should we begin to theorize and talk about the term 'Tribal/Adivasi' itself? Should we begin to formulate our position around and as constitutionally given identities or as self-proclaimed identities? This is because there are historical and insidious conflicts arising among us because of the way our identity is being defined especially in relation to state policy and welfare security. There is intra adivasi/tribal conflict between dominant tribal groups and other groups and also with other communities seeking tribal status. We must initiate discussions within us on the subject to help us truthfully engage with intra power dynamics among our communities. This is important because these processes have a direct bearing on epistemology, knowledge and knowledge production. Another thing that I feel as a collective, we can think of ways to make our congress more inclusive and include people from regional, linguistic backgrounds. I feel our reach is still limited and we are still out of reach of most Adivasis of central India. It will

definitely take time to rectify decades of Hindi colonization and the utter lack of English education that can help us transcend the hegemony of Hindi over us. Can we do something about it? I don't have answers but I thought it could be discussed in group/congress.

A. Wahlang (Mr): I am of the opinion that we must also try and engage processes pertaining to the emergence of the 'middle class/elite' tribal society who have consciously tried to re-invent themselves as the torchbearers of the tribes. The reality as it stands today is alarming with the so called elites joining forces with the dominant class. One must be able to recognise the fact that we have more landless tribals than we ever did in our history. Policies are constantly being formulated to bridge the gap between the dominant structures and the elite tribals leaving little or no space for those push to a lower class to negotiate. In this context it is thus imperative that we examine the power relations between the elite tribes and the landless tribals. In Meghalaya for instance, we have seen a trend of the low income tribal communities losing their land and ultimately their resources to the high income tribals from the same community. Another issue I think we should flag pertains to food which has also become contentious and quite neglected by tribal academics. I suggest we revisit the concept of food sovereignty in the context of tribal realities.

R. Tadu (Ms): Very true Wahlang, we must also recognize that despite our egalitarian image, each of our communities has its inherent structural arrangements

which places people in unequal positions. For instance, gender, 'slaves', ethnic identities, etc., and more recently political power groups and the elite class. There might not have been an exploitative relation as we might assume but in the present scenario the issues like landlessness, land alienation, land accumulation into fewer hands, political nepotism, the upwardly mobile class oriented middle class, and their collusions with power structures from outside against their own people; somehow these are also reflections of our pre-existing traditional practices which was actually based on privilege sanctioning. This way, the question that we collectively might want to answer is how then are we different from communities which are not tribal and have all the above structural features? If we are indeed different, then how? Do we have our own ontological identity? Can we not assume that our situation is more an outcome of diachronic history? Epistemological questions will explain our situation based on concepts at hand. What we need is an ontological understanding as well to be able to reconceptualise our existence and reality. Therefore, as a collective, can we put forward some very good ontological questions that can lead us to defining who we are? What is adivasi, tribal, indigenous, aboriginal, etc., for us?

Permit me to also add an emphasis on the ontological and epistemological distinctions which we are dealing with in our amazing discussions in the thread. There are two primary lines of thinking or concerns going on in the discussion, but for some reason everybody is using the term epistemology where sometimes it is an ontological question. From my point of view I think ours is an ontological quest because we are all trying to understand

and re-articulate who we are. It is more an inward looking exercise and has to be a subjective exploration initially. But I guess this is the only way to give it a voice as of now. Second is the epistemological quest, where we are critically re-looking at the existing knowledge domain and processes of knowledge production while trying to formulate our own conceptual frameworks. So, I feel we need to recognise this distinction and encourage our work in either of the lines. We may pick only one line and leave the other for the next congress, because both are equally important. I was avoiding putting this 'ontological and epistemological confusion' here because I was not very sure myself, but Wahlang's post made it a pertinent question. Many members have raised the similar issues in this thread with its epistemological focus. I feel this collective can, and also is the only one that can, raise this subject that has not been raised. It will be an inward looking exercise for us. I am truly humbled and most empowered to see the discussions here. So, thank you to everyone who are participating here.

G. Gangmei (Ms): To add on to what members have already opined, let me just pose few questions which may be significant for our collective deliberation. Who does our theory intersect and frame as partners? Is there a scope of deeper engagement and usage of concepts emanating from struggles of indigenous peoples in Africa, Australia and Canada? Will it be useful for us to relate with ideas and frameworks as posit by Franklin Frazier and Frantz Fanon rather than with subjugating frameworks as framed by Beteille or Ghurye? It is also important to rethink

and rejuvenate our engagements with Dalit intellectuals in terms of theory building in the light of their lived experience and theoretical formulation around categories such as social exclusion, discrimination, violence, justice etc., to unravel commonalities and differences. Further we need to revisit the terms of intersection and learning between tribal scholar and tribal scholarly activist, and as other members have pointed out, on the question of engaging with the question of gender and patriarchy, I am of the opinion that there is a need to engage with dalit feminism more actively. I believe that there is a lot we can learn from their struggles which in my opinion has direct implications on our theorising. These issues need to be examined as a collective when we talked about preserving our own and also about our struggles towards emancipatory knowledge production. As we look within ourselves while simultaneously challenging dominant discourse we need to consistently assess what we need to preserve and what we need to problematise.

B. S. Ranee (Mr): It looks like we have covered many domains both methodological and theoretico-political in our discussion. However there are few more areas where we need to pay attention to, especially those that concern our contemporary social condition. At the concrete condition we each belong to a distinct community yet as peoples we are conceived and defined as scheduled tribes (exonym) or some of our communities have produced the category adivasi (endonym). In the light of these conditions; who are we as a community or as communities and what do we share in common within us under the frame of tribes

and adivasis. Some clarity on this will help us distinguish ourselves from non-tribes/adivasis especially around some identity markers in contemporary times. As communities we are historically and structurally located in very complex situations, with less capacity to define ourselves in ways in which dominant caste society has framed and subsumed us. The question then is can we re-collect, reformulate and rejuvenate our agencies to position ourselves differently in wider structuro-political context and discourse, and to achieve this what kind of knowledge do we need to produce that would further this process. Also as academics that considers formulating and articulating alternative perspectives and methodological frameworks fundamental to our engagements, we are confronted by systemic processes and forces of change that we have to comprehend and study threadbare. We need to constantly as a collective, capture and explain the politico-economic forces that are rapidly impacting and altering our realities both within and without plus continuously unravel the politico-historical structures that we are located in from time to time and revisit and formulate new ways of perceiving our material conditions, our location in structure, our culture and situations that confront us. Knowledge produced within such contextualised struggles could play major roles in altering the very structure that defines and confines us. Further we must also note that our communities are experiencing rapid change giving rise to stratification along various parameters. The world in which we experience forms of equality is being distorted by stratification. I believe these processes open up important areas of research and knowledge production and is extremely

useful as we challenge stratification. As a collective we need to renew our attention and interest on the egalitarian aspects of our community life and produce new organic knowledges about such dimensions of our realities that challenges community fragmentation, class stratification, gender discrimination and social inequality. Other research areas of concern to tribes/adivasis are state policies and the impact of such policies on our communities. We need as a collective to dissect and unravel embedded subtleties within each policy and provide explanations of the same in manners that are easily comprehensible to the common masses. Current reality is changing fast and we must remain awake to the future socio-political circumstances we are likely to encounter as a community. Our capacity to respond to this is crucial. We need to produce knowledge that will prepare our communities to collectively and cohesively engage and negotiate these realities with greater degree of direction and control.

Finally our real fundamental struggle concerns our ability to break free from current knowledge frameworks and articulate new ways of producing knowledges that are empathetic, relevant, respectful and sensitive to our realities. Needless to say that such struggle is not without repercussions. We need to remain awake to the fact that while we must make it our duty to raise the debate concerning our communities to a valid place in both moral and political discourse, yet we must be cautious because we are faced with complex concrete conditions where there exists no possibility of dissent without consequence. Simply put, the powers that be will not allow us to speak our truth in any other ways sans those ways and frameworks

in which they themselves have meticulously and rigidly laid down for us to represent our truth. Nonetheless we must try, for our battle is not to succeed but to make the attempt in ways that upholds our historical rights, our community dignities, our self respect and our socio-political realities in time and space no matter how reconfigured we will be forced to become by the powers that be in the near future.

M. Pegu (Mr): I am very glad that I am a part of this group and am particularly interested in following the discussions in this group, especially on the matter of 'tribal epistemology'. I read the entire post and the comments are truly enriching. While detailed comments can be given later, I find the aspect of discussing the epistemological concerns very interesting. We as the tribal intellectual collective should definitely problematize the existing frameworks of understanding tribes in India and seek to develop our own methodology to study ourselves, through a participatory approach. The concept note does highlight key aspects which need our attention. I also wanted to know, if we could have strong discussions on the identity struggles among the tribes and engage on questions like: Is struggle for sixth schedule in the current form, proving to be benefical for the tribes or just creating few elites among tribes itself, that Wahlang also talks about? If so, what should we do and how should we remodel our struggles and so on?

M. D. Gergan (Ms): I just wanted to add two important issues. 1) How do we resolve potentially divisive differences within tribes—between tribes in one state and regional differences (North-East and Himalayan tribes vs. Western/

Central/Southern Indian tribes) and the dominance of certain tribe groups vis-à-vis other smaller tribal groups. Certain tribes have been much more visible in mainland politics and academic programs. 2) We must address questions of gender and patriarchy—which is something that dalit intellectuals have shown is a central concern for any truly egalitarian project.

- B. Myrbob (Mr): I feel that we would need to dwell on the idea of methodological possibilities of producing knowledge or articulating epistemology that is superior to dominant epistemologies and not restrict formulations that are directed only towards the emancipation of tribal and adivasi realities. This could specifically be in domains such as biodiversity and climate change, participatory development models, ethics and aesthetics etc. Also, there is a need to think about problematising the non-tribes/adivasis epistemologies to locate the superior positioning of tribal/adivasi knowledge in methodology and axiology. The above are my humble additions.
- S. Munda (Ms): It's encouraging and motivating to read and see our collective's reflections and discussions on struggles that challenge colonial domination in discourse within the larger context of Adivasi's struggle for survival. This goes to show that our writers, researchers, academicians and activists are alive to the issues that confronts us and are of concern to the well being of Tribes/Adivasi. In my opinion the need for collectivising today of Tribal Intellectuals has arisen due to repression, exploitation and the humiliation we are subjected to as communities over

centuries. We are here to produce truthful explanation, people sensitive knowledge and emancipatory discourses concerning Tribal realities. Throughout these long years under various forces that marginalise us, our Tribal histories have not been recorded/documented sensitively and hence the need to commit ourselves and struggle to bring our histories and our epistemology to the forefront. I strongly feel the perspective/knowledge coming from within should not be limited to writings and documentation only, but should transcend the wall of academia. What I mean to assert here is that theory needs to be realised in action, as in some kind of a future vision of our communities. We are on the verge of losing our identity, culture and even existence due to our own negligence of our unique Adivasi way of life. We need to revisit our own history that was once lived by our communities and articulate them in a manner that resurrects our glorious past which we should then re-insert back into our lived experience. This I believe will sustain our Adivasi identity and our community existence. If not I feel the threat of being submerged by dominant groups is a real possibility. We need to explore our weakness within our own community and bridge the gaps accordingly, then our activities and our thrust on emancipatory writings will make greater sense to ourselves and to our communities. The collective can discuss further on an action plan and as a group we could take it forward.

M. Pegu (Mr): During my researches on my own tribe and others in Assam, I have found that most of the studies done on tribal communities are being done by people who have little understanding of the community, which have

led to gross misrepresentation of facts and the scientific understanding/logic behind the socio-cultural ethics and practices. Moreover, this body of knowledge is being constantly referred to by various upcoming scholars, which lead to a vicious cycle of misrepresentation. There is a need to break this and I hope that this group can lead the process by asking relevant questions like 'who and how the body of existing literature of tribal communities was/ being developed? What are the steps that need to be taken to break this cycle etc.?

Moreover, as a trade unionist, I would also like to highlight the issue of 'tribes' as workers. In the current neoliberal world, there is increasing migration from rural to urban areas in the lookout for another world. A vast majority of these migrants are tribal people, who compete with other communities for work in cities across India. Moreover, the current model of development is constantly pushing out tribes from their existing homes and livelihoods and forcing them to migrate and look for work. Under these processes, it would be viable for us to also see how these changes are impacting the tribes as a whole, socially, politically, economically and culturally. Moreover, questions like can or have the existing trade unions been able to address the issues of tribal workers in the real sense are crucial. If yes/no, how? Moreover, what are the steps that can be taken to address the continuing challenge of displacement, deprivation, migration and oppression of tribes needs to be discussed and deliberated upon. More later...

B. S. Ranee (Mr): Dear M. Pegu ... At this juncture in history the subject domain of trade unions and tribes has

become essential. The stratification of tribal communities around class is a reality and the appropriation of one class from the other is becoming stark. However we are yet to arrive at a state where class has overwhelmed our sense of community.

R. R. Khongwir: Reading the framework and the various approaches to delayer the Tribal/Adivasi lived experience from its present somewhat insulated reality, I think the questions raised, the pondering points and the areas of scrutiny are precise and scrupulous zones that needs to be addressed upon. As a group we also must be aware and responsive to the present market realities and its role in shaping our existence. I look forward to the rich, unblemished knowledge that would sprout out of this campaign to not only reveal the actual tribal/adivasi context but to also share the awareness and understanding beyond our own immediate audience.

N. Kindo (Mr): Contemporary political economy, varied historical contestations and the uninformed agendas of different institutions throughout the ages have left the tribal community isolated and persistently exploited. The need of contemporary times is to establish discourses and expand our horizons of discussions in and out of academia. The gradual changing economic environment, the statist and larger society's need to use resources and in the process deprive tribals from their 'Jal, Jangal, Zameen' and the institutionalized prospect to meet the demands of burgeoning economy is an ongoing reality where tribes will be hit hard. Sociologically our traditional institutions and

their roles have weakened throughout these processes, and politically we are constantly failing to negotiate our realities with the ever dominant regime and with caste society. Here the question arises about the role of tribes in academics—what would be our role? In the theoretical trajectory of post-colonial theorization, the ongoing larger debate about "Can Subaltern Speak", should be problematised and we need to question whether it speaks for tribals, or whether it allows represention of what we want to speak? I am of the opinion that we should not ignore or reject the ongoing discourses and within it the various schools of thought, but instead to establish a conjunction of these theories with our framework to proliferate and deepen the tribal discourse in different domains of academic disciplines.

The Tribal Intellectual Collective is a great platform to initiate this objective in our quest for survival and existence. We need to persist in negotiating with society and institutions in our everyday life and to articulate our context in order to further and establish a tribal discourse as we strive for fair justice in today's world.

A. Akhup (Mr): Tribal economy I think is important. M. Pegu and others, known to this subject could think further into economy and aspects such as migration, labour, capital, market, urbanization in hill regions/tribal/adivasi areas etc.

R. P. Lepcha (Ms): I think we need to focus on tribal knowledge preservation. I am specifically talking about our 'intangible heritage' which is taking a back seat in this age of progress. Oral histories are important and

we should be looking at conducive methods to protect them. All adivasi and tribal groups have relied on oral tradition as means of transmission of knowledge for generations, and the negligence of it harbours the death of a vital knowledge system. By focusing on oral histories, which more often than not, depends on the vernacular medium for preservation, we have to acknowledge that it strengthens our roots in the entire process. Although the entire discussion in this thread opened up lacunas in our self-introspective studies, I could not help but notice that we relied heavily, even in the process of condemning it, on thoughts, ideas and terms which are all borrowed. It is true, that this is an academic collective with great aims and facing challenges at every turn, but as someone pointed out earlier, we must not lose ourselves in the labyrinth of academic jargons and stereotypes. I may be wrong, or it may just be my shortcomings, but if we are at all trying to fight the mass academic tide of misrepresentation, then it should be in our own terms, concentrating more on clarity than winding jargons. Let's keep it simple and let's be heard.

N. T. Trichao (Mr): I am extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to be one of TICI's members. I would like to add to the above discussion in relation to the undying spirit of the storytelling tradition of the Tribals. I strongly feel that an exploration of the rich literary culture and history of oral tradition will certainly shed light on vast depository of literary treasures and captures the entire epistemology hitherto unknown to the rest of the world as it was only in oral form. This entails, therefore, an examination of the oral tradition which is the source

of knowledge of history of origin, philosophy, religion, culture and social life of the people. Having stated the above, however, the intent is not to argue that a complete reverting of the past is possible. Rather, reviving 'tradition' so as to suit the ideological value in the negotiation of identity. Along with the historical, political and social problems that the Tribal/Adivasis face, there are also stories that celebrate the peoples' tradition and culture and the belief system deep rooted in history yet closely knitted in present realities. As a collective, in a lot of ways we can bring positive stories and respond to the misunderstanding and distortion marked since long.

A. Akhup (Mr): Do we need to add a line or two on this collective space (if we have it then ignore this idea). After reading literature on trends of academic engagements mainly at the university levels, I feel the need for a proactive creation and propagation of this space. In the absence of such an initiative, the space may fall an easy prey to the academic hegemony. What I have felt and come to know as an active member of this group is that 'we are beyond' any of these academic institutions defined by strict disciplinary boundaries on terms of the scientific method, theory and perspective and overall goal in the society. How are we different or similar in that case? Specifically, how do we define (if that is possible at all) this collective and the initiative? For me, it gives me a unique space of the first order, a maiden experience and in a way allows me to articulate, discuss, agree to discuss towards understanding what knowledge is and how knowledge helps me to understand myself, others, the collective, struggles, experience, community, state,

citizenship and in short, my world. I see this space as vital for life and the agency of humanity. I could imagine this space as 'sitting around the fire', a scene most prominent among tribal communities especially living in the abode of ecology and nature. Life and the lived are one here and there is freedom to interpret and construct my worldview, meanings of life, my identity and to understand struggles, the particulars, universal and diversity (lived and shared boundaries or inter-intra relations) on the lap of mother ecology, biodiversity, pluralism, self rule, self-respect, coexistence, human development and collective worldview. In a real sense, every action of mine is a struggle to understand what could be 'an idea of a state' which can embody this reality. How do I relate with the idea of modernity, science, religion, culture, politics, structure or citizenship, state and nationalism?

R. Nayak (Mr): Others have seen the oral narratives as mere uncivilised oral/folklore. By the time we started thinking on our history and reached universities our oral narratives became endangered. If we still do not focus on our oral narratives; I would rather say oral literature, we would not reproduce our histories. Moreover, the histories produced on us by others will be seen as authentic. It was produced without understanding language, culture of the tribal/Adivasi and their worldview. So, I would agree with you all and strongly feel that there is a great need to engage with our oral literature to rewrite our histories.

A. Akhup (Mr): Going through literature, it is seen that studies have been conducted basically in areas such as

history, oral tradition and culture, social structure including kinship, political structure, tribal politics and state system, economy, governance, education, health, gender aspects also have come in, movements and struggles including self rule and self determination. But the studies are usually not accessible to people although it is meant for them. We need to be consciously working towards arguing for the people based works, local authors, tribal intellectuals.

B. Jojo (Mr): I agree with Akhup. But the location from where they have been writing and what we are intending to, is from within. That's where going beyond the existing writing becomes important.

K. A. Manjusha (Ms): The term 'epistemology' derived from two Greek words i.e. 'episteme' meaning 'knowledge' and 'logos' meaning 'science' and hence together, the 'science of knowledge'. Here, as a collective we should take the responsibility of 'preserving the past' for the benefit of our future generations. As we are concentrating on that through research, we have to derive our own methodologies and theories to explain and justify our realm of research. Mere documentation of the past will not produce a meaningful result. What we should do is to explore our knowledge systems in the areas like land and land use, occupational/livelihood patters, health systems, ecological/environmental knowledge, pedagogy incorporated within the idea of land, the knowledge regarding seasons, predictions, cultivation etc., through our own methods i.e., obviously with the help of oral traditions. But, at the same time we should use the strength

of science in order to justify and to get acceptance for our knowledge systems. To make it clearer, if we are dealing with the occupational pattern of a particular tribe/adivasi, we should be able to define their skill with the application of science and therefore its scientific implications in each and every stage of the activity which should be brought forward and explained. Likewise, we can apply the skills or science of engineering in the different tribal/adivasi occupational patterns. We should be able to compare our indigenous knowledge in medicine with the contemporary system of medicine. Decoding our rituals and practices will open up a wide range of opportunities. In the contemporary era of scientific spirit and reasoning, we should also look through that perspective. Incorporating the strength of science to our indigenous knowledge systems will provide it the status of science and through that we can prove our knowledge systems as equal to or more than the existing contemporary knowledge systems. I think, that's the only way to preserve, document and protect our knowledge systems and worldviews and the one and only way to regain our past glory. Until and up to our fulfilling this requirement of scientific logic and reasoning, our knowledge systems will remain primitive, romanticized and unaccepted forever. As prof. Bipin Jojo has rightly remarked, we should use their knowledge systems to justify or highlight our knowledge systems and we are very rich in our knowledge systems too.

B. S. Ranee (Mr): Probably we could assert in point two as follows...The degeneration of our languages and the loss of (oral) knowledge related to land, water, forest, people, agriculture and livelihoods.

R. Tadu (Ms): I think the note has come out well, though quite broad, but necessary. Lepcha (and Akhup and Nayak) have pointed out something very important which I see as point 2 under: "Two contexts we need to scrutinize". We already have a great tradition of knowledges, histories, literary aesthetics and unique self expressions embodied in our oral traditions. They were preserved so far by our older generations but is now under great danger of getting lost forever. Oral histories as a method stand out differently from oral traditions as an important source of knowledge. It is an inward looking process. Based on lived realities they are endangered too. This topic is well accommodated within the concept note under various headings. But it would be nice to have it spelt out once.

A. Ekka (Mr): The concerns are very well articulated and it would indeed push to build a grounded tribal/adivasi epistemological position. While building on the knowledge production we need to be sensitive to some of the traditional practices of isolation to knowledge. Many of the traditional practices and skills related to medicine, food culture, and worship rituals, agricultural practices etc. were kept in isolation among the circles of a community or family to preserve the heritage. The challenge for us is about how to locate the issues of the kind and what would be our position upon these in the contemporary times.

B. Bhukya (Mr): Sorry for the late reply. Have read through all the responses and going by the content of discussion I could visualize a great future for the collective in general and adivasi scholarship in particular. I would

make just a few more additions from my end, which could probably enrich the discussions further and hope that as we progress, we may develop many more questions.

To begin with, I think we need to engage with modernity as a contextual reality and a field of theoretical engagement much more. Modernity is and will become a major issue for the adivasis. To access and experience modernity one has to become or is forced to become modern, and the process of modernization is so painful to the adivasis. How then do adivasis perceive modernity or what is modernity to adivasis is a critical issue. This is so, particularly after the flood of corporate capitalism which survives on image creation or brand making and pays scant respect to the basic needs of the society, and on this count the adivasis are experiencing a very gloomy situation. In this context what are the structural and concrete conditions that confront adivasis has to be addressed.

On the question pertaining to epistemology, I think liberatory and critical social science theories and methodologies are extremely useful to examine and scrutinize adivasi/tribe realities. This framework frees us from the rigidity of traditional conceptions of methodology and theory. Critical social science opens up spaces to develop our own theory and methodology source concretely from our own work. It helps us to carry out issue based studies wherein the issue itself becomes the methodological and theoretical premise of the study. For example, if you are working on the question of autonomy, autonomy itself becomes your methodology, while constantly looking at the issue from the autonomy perspective.

The other important concern relates to what should be the questions of study. All the existing studies, both Indian and global, have treated adivasis/tribe as poor and as being subsumed in poverty and have turned adivasi studies as poverty studies, as if poverty is the fundamental issue of the adivasis. We need to come out from such a framework that stresses on poverty as fundamental and instead posit the politico-social dimensions and issues of adivasi/tribe realities as central to our research and theoretical engagement. We need to make a case that the adivasi issue is politico-social and not poverty as such. It is now coming to light that the adivasi/tribe liberation or development projects largely failed because the overarching discourse was framed and lock within this understanding. Adivasis' issue is not poverty but political.

We should also come out from the conceptions of change as framed by G. S. Ghurye's, M. N. Srinivas' and Andre Beteille whose theoretical dominance in Indian sociological and anthropological studies about adivasis/tribes is near absolute. This approach posits our communities as being always in transition, whereas caste society is positioned to have already reached the stage of being a civilization. It is imperative for us to come out from this caste centric 'change' business and insert ideological integrity into our community by making a case for alternative civilizations, alternative modernities or even multiple modernities. If caste society conceives itself as civilized then adivasi/tribe are equally civilized societies but of a different civilization.

We also need to recover our intellectual history, as in we need to treat rumors, myths, witchcrafts, stories, narratives, songs, ballads which are preserved for generations in adivasi society as intellectual history. This has been distorted, badly romanticized and inferiorised, reducing such content to mere folklore. We need to tell the world that this is our intellectual history on which our life, philosophy and civilisation is founded upon.

B. S. Ranee (Mr): Here it is important to comprehend some key issues related to knowledge production in the context of Tribes/Adivasi peoples in India. As posit above: 'the near hegemonic hold of west european and caste epistemologies over adivasi/tribal epistemology in the domain of knowledge production'.

The condition captured by the statement above speaks of very complex processes that would require deeper reflections and engagement far beyond our discussion. However a quick reading of the statement does bring out, in very simple yet stark words, the reality concerning the current structure of knowledge production that has direct implications on tribal/adivasi realities and the myriad communities that constitute it. Although the subject matter requires deeper study and analysis, I will allow myself the liberty to reflect only upon a few key issues, which I consider important to discuss in the light of the particular thrust of this point.

Let me first begin by stating a simple observation; the single community that is 'near invisible' in Indian academia and academic institutions are peoples from Tribal and Adivasi communities. Now this is not a scandalous statement to make by any measure even after 65 odd years of India attaining its independence from British

rule. There are reasons why Tribal and Adivasi scholars are missing in academia and why their voices rarely heard. The few that we hear articulated in public domain are the stifled voices of activists soaked in struggle. This is not merely a situation related to and given rise by the small population size of Tribes which stands roughly at 8.6% of the total population, but because of many other reasons other than those that are very complex actually.

In Indian academia, it is important to note that most of the writings about Tribes and Adivasi realities currently dominating discursive space are being written by people either from Europe or from caste society. It is in relation to this that the Tribal Intellectual Collective India has probably drawn the attention of scholars and academics specifically identifying 'epistemology' rather than any other politico-methodological condition in their conceptual note. My personal reading and unraveling of the same makes gestures not to any disagreement about non-adivasi and non-tribe engaging with tribal and adivasi realities, but to western European epistemology and caste epistemologies subsuming and dominating Tribal and Adivasi epistemology in all spheres of knowledge production.

The way the condition is situated at present, most knowledge production about Tribes and Adivasis lay with academic elites of caste society and among the intellectual class of European plus American society. It is often heard that there are far more 'reliable' knowledge being produced, and far more academic engagements taking place in caste societies and in Europe about Tribes/Adivasis than within Tribal/Adivasi community itself. I do not want to stretch

the argument too far, but it is not an understatement to say that the Tribal/Adivasi communities are empirically rich research fodder for studies conducted by non-tribes/ non-adivasis. While the majority of these studies concerns global corporate capitalism, ultra-left mobilization and Tribal/Adivasi resistance, some however engage with environment, land, culture, religion and global capital. Each of these studies goes to serve a specific research objective of either western society (European/American) or of caste society. It is also important to note at this juncture that there are multiple intersections taking place between western society and caste societies. Contestations and disagreements if any between these two societies are mainly on grand theories. However both these two realities experience and consider the imperatives of globalization, industrialization, corporate capitalism and the merits of western scientific values as fundamental and overlapping interest.

Just in order to free myself from the likelihood of being grossly misunderstood, let me point out that I do not intent to argue that such non-tribe/non-adivasi groups exercise restraint in knowledge production about Tribes/Adivasis. That each of these groups generally produce knowledge for the consumption of their own specific societies/realities is a given. Most of these academics engage with questions that unfurl directly from the socio-political upheavals that their societies are going through from time to time. If Tribes/Adivasis ever enter their social imagination, it is for theoretical analysis within their theoretical frameworks. Tribes/Adivasis are conceived more as important data by default rather than

by conscious choice and there is no sense of responsibility or commitment to the Tribal/Adivasi reality per se. There are exceptions of course but the general trend is such. Tribes/Adivasis in such a frame are useful data that helps explain the complexity and angst of both 'western' and caste realities for their own theoretical consumption. In the light of such views, I have often asked myself: what and how have Tribes and Adivasis benefited by this knowledge produced? Of what purpose is this knowledge to them? Does it help them comprehend their own realities better? What impact does a theory formulated from caste epistemology and western epistemology have on Tribal/Adivasi communities?

Epistemology as a subject generally engages with the premise, ways and processes involved in comprehending oneself in context. The premise and framework in which reflection takes place constitutes a worldview. Since Tribes/Adivasis are forced to conceive their realities in knowledge produced from the epistemological frameworks of western or caste societies, social asymmetry and discrepancies in reflection are a given.

Fundamental to both caste epistemology and western epistemology I believe lays one of the most elevating but supposedly brute geopolitical processes known simply as 'universalisation'. The process of 'universalisation', that is, the relentless desire to try to universalize the experience of a situated 'particular' across time, space, realities and communities has had diabolical repercussions on Tribes/Adivasis. The metaphysical respect given to this physical need to celebrate the experience of phenomena in only a single way of life, with a single language, a single rationally,

a single belief, possibly even a single emotion is what lies at the heart of universalisation. Such perspectives have often led to the normalizing of beliefs that there is something fundamentally natural in the 'homogenization of diversity'. This has even led to the use of force to uphold such a belief system. About such processes, there is no better example than colonialism itself, a process that used all means and measure to bring and mould its entire subject into a single belief system with the objective of imposing physical dominance, cultural subservience and mental servitude.

Still very much bounded and under the spell of these colonial frames, it is not shocking then to note that in the current context, Tribes/Adivasis are passive recipients of knowledge produced by such societies and by default they become incapable to partake in any knowledge production that counts as 'verifiable' and 'reliable', 'objective' and 'neutral', meaningful and useful. I hold the believe that such state of affairs are least to do with academic abilities and intellectual sophistication, but rather more to do with epistemological fanaticism of the dominant and a total disregard for multiple realities as contrasted to single universality.

In a world marked by diversity it is on such pretext that throughout the years of British colonialism and right to the present day of caste society's dominance, Tribes/Adivasis have been excluded from knowledge production. To be more precise, it is important to state that the exclusion is less to do with a society with multiple bodies, but much more to do with the negation of multiple epistemologies. It is from such exclusionary processes that

four crucial lived realities emerged: (i) a whole society is conceived as backward (ii) the people that make up the society are conceived as being unnecessarily different (iii) the practices of the society are seen as restraining growth (iv) the production of knowledge by and about the community that cannot be generalized/universalized are useless.

It is not shocking then to note that most 'knowledge' about Tribes/Adivasis that were marked as 'scientific' were produced by British ethnographers and surveyors, or by Indian anthropologist who conceived themselves as located in positions that counts as universal. It is a different truth though that each of these groups producing such knowledges only served to inform or enlighten their own societies; either western Europeans' societies or caste Indian societies. The few Tribes/Adivasis who were able to partake in the process either struggled against massive forces of structural and psychological inferiorisation or simply submitted to subservience under the framework of the dominant in the name of producing 'universal' knowledge in order to get their works being accepted as meaningful by western European and caste society.

Finally to conclude let me turn the gaze back to our initial conceptual frame. The discussion as initially conceived was meant to achieve three things: (1) unravel a distinct ontological epistemological tribal/adivasi position from a very rooted axiological location (2) give ourselves a (very) broad sense of our own location, context and macro challenges, but most important (3) through this note we are academically but indirectly confronting 'mainstream' academia both in the lived/shared and in processes

involved in 'their' production of knowledge about us. Nonetheless am sure that everyone is aware of the need to be cautious and not be seen as parochial and disrespectful to the larger academic community. We are academics engaging in knowledge production that is aimed at forms of emancipatory writing from a very historically distinct location. Our task is to challenge any knowledge or knowledge production process that subjugates, inferiorized and medievalise tribal/adivasi communities, plus as a collective we recognise the importance of engaging in deeper collective reflections towards knowledge and methodological processes that emancipates our realities.

Our final collectively arrived at conceptual framework for empirical consideration and theoretical reflection as we engage in Tribal and Adivasi studies is as follows:

Towards unravelling, deepening and theorising perspectives from within, we consider

Two realities we need to problematise as a collective

- (1) The overarching dominant theoretical frameworks subsuming tribal studies, which are layered into our realities emanating from historical waves of colonisation
- (2) The near hegemonic hold of European and Caste epistemologies over adivasi/tribal epistemology in the domain of knowledge production

Two contexts we need to scrutinise as a collective

(1) The degeneration of our languages and the loss of (oral) knowledge related to land, water, forest, people, agriculture and livelihoods, language and history (2) The inability of tribal academics to further knowledges of tribes and gain socio-political legitimacy for the same in academia

Three questions we need to engage with as a collective

- (1) What tribal epistemology/adivasi epistemology is: can it be methodologically arrived at, philosophically articulated and theoretically defended
- (2) Can knowledge that is emancipatory for adivasi and tribal realities be produced by us: how should we proceed?
- 3) What can we learn from other indigenous communities' experiences across the world?

Five social conditions we need to reflect on as a collective

- (1) Who we are as a community, what we share in common within tribes/adivasis and historically and socially how we are distinct from non-tribes/adivasis?
- (2) The key (identity) markers of our community/communities in contemporary times.
- (3) Our location in history and how are we being defined in the present context by varied forces that subsume us.
- (4) Can we re-collect, reformulate and rejuvenate our agencies to position ourselves differently in wider structuro-political context and discourse.
- (5) The kind of knowledge we need to produce that would further this process.

Six theoretical domains we need to produce knowledge on as a collective

- (1) Can we capture and explain the politico-economic forces that are rapidly impacting and altering our realities?
- (2) The politico-historical structures that we are located in and how do we revisit and formulate new ways of perceiving while producing new data to alter this structure?
- (3) The egalitarian aspects of our community life: can we produce new organic knowledge about such realities that challenge community fragmentation, class stratification, gender discrimination and social inequality.
- (4) The immediate state policies that impacts us and how we dissect and read embedded subtleties; also locating explanations within comprehensible paradigms of change.
- (5) The future socio-political circumstance we are likely to encounter as a community: can we produce knowledge that will prepare our communities to collectively and cohesively engage and negotiate these realities with greater degree of direction and control.
- (6) Can we break free from current knowledge frameworks and articulate new ways of producing knowledges that are empathetic, relevant, respectful and sensitive to our realities?

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