

# CONTESTING MARGINALISATION

Conversations on  
Social Justice, Identities and Resource  
Rights

Volume 2

Interviews by

Vidya Bhushan Rawat



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It gives me pleasure to present this book based on my conversations with leading land rights activists, academics, policy-planners from different countries and diverse backgrounds. I always felt that there is enormous knowledge among people's movements particularly those working with the indigenous people, Dalits and Adivasis in different parts of the world and that remain undocumented as we all converse with 'experts', 'academics' and 'policymakers' but not those who work among the people as well as part of the movement. This book is unique as it contains conversations from a diverse backgrounds from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Philippines in Asia to Kenya, South Africa and Senegal in Africa. Interestingly three interviews are with those who led ILC at different time. Mr Bruce Moore, International Land Coalition's founding director, now based in Ottawa, Canada, Mr Madiodio Niasse, former director ILC, now based in Dakar, Senegal and Dr Michael J Taylor, currently Director of the Secretariat of the International Land Coalition, based in Rome, though originally hail from Botswana.

My international journey in the land rights movement started with wonderful friends such as Mr Bharat Shrestha from Nepal, Mohammad Kamaluddin from Bangladesh, Nathaniel Don Marquez, Antonio 'Tony' Quizon and Roel Ravanera from the Philippines and Lucia Angelucci from Italy. I am extremely happy that all are part of this conversation. There are many others who I approached but could not respond.

I am equally thankful to Ms Rowshan Jahan Moni, ALRD, Dhaka, Dr Jagat Basnet, CSRC Nepal, Mr Danial Kobe, Executive Director, Ogiek Peoples' Development Program(OPDP), Kenya, Ms Constance Mugale, South Africa for responding to my questionnaire in detail. My humble thank to Ms Livia Celini, one of the founders of Fasting for Food, based in Rome and whose passion working to eradicate hunger and poverty is reflected in the conversation with her.

Thank you, brother Raj Mohan, from Netherlands for his world view and making us understand the plight of the indentured labourers who were taken by the colonial powers to the Caribbean. A big thanks to Sheik Mohammad Mukhtir, a humanist activist from Mauritania who spoke against slavery and caste discrimination and faced death sentence. Salute to his courageous stand and work of Humanist International for getting him released. I must thank Humanist International for helping me connect with Sheikh.

I am also thankful to Aminata Mbaye Fall from Dakar who I met during the Global Land Forum meeting and though she was reporting for local channel which interviewed me, I felt important to speak to her about women's rights in that country. Even when English was not her language yet she responded to my questions which gave me a glimpse of what was happening there. This is the power of Global Land Forums where you meet diverse kind of concerned individuals.

Back home in India, there have been many friends whose life have been inspiring for me. Two of the leading Women's Rights defenders Ms Burnad Fathima and Ms Jyothi Raj have provided minute details of their movement in Tamilnadu and Karnataka. My sincere acknowledgement of their work. Prof K S Chalam, former Chair-in-charge, Union Public Service Commission and a leading educationist responded in details to my questionnaire. And finally, I express my deep sense of gratitude to my dear friend, Manas Jena, a human rights defender, intellectual and champion of Dalit Land Rights in Odisha.

There are many others who are not here in the conversations but I wanted them to be. Many promised but could not deal with the deadlines and their own personal issues. I hope I will be able to have them in another volume.

This volume would not have been possible without the deep personal support that I got from my wife Namita and daughter Vidita Priyadarshini who provided her valuable suggestions. I must acknowledge friends in the Humanist International UK for helping me speak to Sheik Mohammad Mukhtir, living in exile in France. My special acknowledgement to International Land Coalition and its various members who were the reason of my working on the book and have seen my journey of the last 25 years.

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Vidya Bhushan Rawat

April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023





# INTRODUCTION

Conversations are important tools to understand historical issues through those who have been actively working either on the ground or part of the movements. I have found conversations, a method to protect the 'oral' history of movements. Many great travellers brought some of the greatest historical facts through their travelogues and narratives which are no less than professional historians. That apart, issues of social justice always fascinated me and it has been a commitment since I understood the basics of our cultural crisis through the writings of Dr Baba Saheb Ambedkar and began participating in various activities and programmes of the Ambedkarite movement. That was in early 1990s when India saw turmoil after the Union government declared its intention to implement 27 % quota in the government services for the Socially and Educationally Backward Communities. When I saw the protests led by the urban middle dominant caste youths and their parents taking up the streets and violently protesting against a government provision which was meant to undo the historical wrong against the youths of Bahujan communities, a majority of those hail from peasantry, artisan and other such occupations which were 'reserved' for them under the 'caste based' iniquitous social order. Why were the 'communities' who have enjoyed the 'privileges' so hysterical in opposing an act which can be termed a historical demand under the affirmative action programme as after all, the government was only providing about 27% reservation for 55% population who are our own people. Often the political and social scientists in India while discussing about caste discrimination grossly underestimate the issue of land and other natural resources like Forest and Water.

Our Human Rights movements were mostly focussing on 'civil' and 'political' rights and the representatives and organisations of Dalits, adivasis and other marginalised communities always claimed that most of these elitists' organisations did not really care for their issues. It is not that they did not raise the issue but there has been a trust deficit. Many of those

affiliated with socialist or left streams termed these movements of Dalits and backward communities as 'identity' movement dangerous for our 'polity'. Many of them suggested that while they would like to fight for the 'land' rights but were uncomfortable with the issues of 'representation' and 'agency' of the community leaders to speak for them. The question of representation has always haunted the upper elite of our society whether political or intellectual. While political representation was able to provide the marginalised some space but that was never attempted in literature and social movements where the upper elite was still 'defining' Dalits, Adivasis and their issues. A deeper understanding of the India's social movements through the prism of Ambedkar-Phule-Periyar-Birsa, the icons of Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi movement is the way forward. Their thought-provoking ideas helped me chart my path in the land rights movement and I tried to understand the issues through their philosophy. For me land rights, food sovereignty or hunger issues are not delinked with the identity issues. My understanding of caste and identity issues helped me reach the communities and felt being part of them. Even today, I feel that without social and cultural attachment with the communities we only become patrons and not part of the movement. For me Land and resource rights are not merely 'economic' issues as many thinks but the very identity of the communities and their culture as well.

It is natural that you will look at the global issues with a much better understanding particularly the issues of racial discrimination as well as indigenous people's rights once you understand and are part of anti-caste discrimination movement back home. Being part of the Ambedkarite movement actually helped me better understand the dynamics of caste and discrimination not only in India but in South Asia. The more I began participating in the international forums, the bigger was my curiosity to explore the issue of caste and race questions in those societies.

It was the period when I was learning and debating the issues of Hunger, Food Security and Land Rights with friends both nationally and internationally. In 1994, I came in touch with Food First Information and Action Network (FIAN) International and participated in various workshops, training programmes and events in the subsequent years. At one conference organised by FIAN International in Paris in May 1997, a 'concept' note was circulated by Mr Krishna Ghimire working with UNRISD, Geneva. I found the note interesting and wrote a mail to

Krishna about my willingness to get associated with it. Soon Krishna got in action and we had our first meeting of South Asia Network of Land Rights Activists in Dhaka organised by Association for Land Reforms and Development (ALRD) Bangladesh. Mr Bharat Shrestha, from College for Development Studies Nepal, Mr Mohammad Kamaluddin from ARBN, Bangladesh, Mr Shah Mohammad Jinnah, Bangladesh, Mr MR Choudhury from ALRD were the participant. I participated from India and presented my paper on the Non-Implementation of Land Ceiling Laws in Tarai, Uttar Pradesh. After that we met in Kathmandu and Krishna informed us of the idea of an international network named as Knowledge network and later it became Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty. From 1997 to 2002, five years of close association in South Asia actually built a strong bondage among us. Numerous events were organised in all the three countries and we became like family friends and that bond still exists more than 25 years later. It was in 2002, the idea was converted into action in the name of International Land Coalition and in its first general body meeting in Rome, I was elected Member of the top decision-making body, the Coalition Council. Both FIAN International and later International Land Coalition broadened my understanding of the land and resource rights. Later, my association with International Humanist and Ethical Union, London which is now known as Humanist International broadened my horizon on humanism, secularism and rule based international order. It further strengthened my capabilities to analyse things critically and reasonably. I found international treaties and covenants on Economic Social Cultural Rights, UN Declaration on Indigenous people, issues of Free Prior Informed Consent, FPIC, CEDAW guidelines, UPR essential for any one wish to understand Land rights and identity issues of the indigenous people apart from going through the work of not only Baba Saheb Ambedkar, Jyoti Ba Phule and EVR Periyar and many other ideologues and thinkers. I can say that my domestic understanding of the movement was helped by the internationalisation and meetings with friends from different countries.

The first volume of 'Conversations' was on Social Justice and Ambedkarism which has interviews of those who were strong pillars of movement for social transformation and human rights. It provided insight of the Ambedkarite movement and its ideological strength which the communities on margin needed at this moment when the rise and rise of

right-wing forces in India has not only pushed the minorities and marginalised towards marginalisation but also rabid corporatisation process in India. For me conversations are the best way to understand the history and local dynamics of an issue. As my journey and association with the international land rights movement now is over 25 years, I felt important to speak to various activists and defenders of Land Rights of the indigenous people. This book is a tribute to all those who have been consistently raising the issue of access to natural resources of the indigenous people including Adivasis and Dalits. Most of those who are part of the conversations have known me for years and have dedicated their lives for the cause of the rights of the most marginalised, peasants and indigenous people. This series on conversations is also a tribute to International Land Coalition and my association with them since the very beginning as a number of those who have been interviewed here too are associated with the Coalition from the very beginning. The conversations with Mr Bruce Moore, founder-director of International Land Coalition, followed by conversation with Madiodio Niase, his successor as well as with Dr Michael J Taylor, current Director of the Secretariat, International Land Coalition, gives you glimpse of the work that the Coalition has done and now become the biggest source of information and action on the Land and natural resource management world-wide.

Bruce Moore has been a great source of strength for me who not only encouraged me at the Coalition but continued his association with me after his retirement. We have been in constant touch over the years and discuss various issues. The conversation with him gives glimpse of his understanding and wide-ranging experience at the international level. The Second interview in the international section is with Mr Madiodio Niase, who was the second director of the International Land Coalition. A soft-spoken but extremely workaholic, Madiodio hails from Senegal. It was difficult to speak with him due to his tight schedule as well as our time differences yet I was able to convince him for a discussion on zoom. Conversation with Madiodio was recorded but because of paucity of time many things could not be discussed. I did the transcription and requested him to respond to some more questions but he could not respond to it. I have waited till the last moment but because he could not respond, I am producing the conversation that we had on zoom and video link is already there on our YouTube channel: Lokayat.

The third in the series is Dr Michael J Taylor, currently director of the ILC secretariat in Rome. Despite his extremely busy schedule, he spared time last year to participate in a zoom conversation with me. Though I tried to transcribe his conversation but felt that if he could respond to my questions separately, it would be far better. He cooperated and responded to the questions raised by me which also provide ILC's position particularly on the issue of Food Security Summit organised by the UN which became controversial because it was felt by various international organisations and social movements that private corporations were trying to hijack the developmental agenda. I have known Mike for years since he joined the International Land Coalition and now as the Director of the Secretariat, he has been spearheading changes in ILCs policies and programmes. Hailing from Botswana and belonging to a family of Social workers which actually reflect in his articulation on the issues concerning the most marginalised.

Looking back the journey when I was just learning things, Bharat Shrestha from Nepal, Mohammad Kamaluddin, from Bangladesh, Nathaniel Don Marquez and Tony Quizon from ANGOC, Philippines have been there from the very beginning in the land rights movement who shared their experiences and achievements with me from time to time. And it gives me great satisfaction that they could spare their time to respond to my probing questions. Their insights are enlightening. My dear friend from CSRC Nepal, Dr Jagat Basnet responded in details despite his not so good health conditions. It shows his deep respect for the issue we were discussing. My friend from Bangladesh, Ms Rowshan Jahan Moni from Association for Land Reforms and Development, actually the first organisations to host me in 1997, gave detailed responses of Land issues in Bangladesh.

I am extremely happy that my friend from South Africa Constance Galeo Mugale was able to spare her time to not only speak to me but provided thought provoking analysis of the issues related to African people who have been exploited earlier by the colonial masters as well as the issue of women in the land rights movement. She is an extremely passionate woman who has been actively advocating radical land reforms and women's issue in South Africa. She also is a strong votary of the food sovereignty of the communities. The conversation with her provide you the crisis in South Africa and how it is related to identity and gender question too. My dear friend Daniel Kobe from Kenya speak about the

situation in Kenya and how he came into land rights movement. Daniel work with indigenous people in Kenya has got international recognition with ILC honouring his work. His life is a role model for the reason that he not only worked for the human rights of his community and has experience of living in India too for his studies. That way, Daniel has understanding of India's caste system and issue of Dalits. It was wonderful to understand from him how Indian diaspora look towards the native people of Kenya.

There are two conversations from Italy but they are broadly about movement, people and communities as both of them are associated with international organisations including International Land Coalition. Livia Cellini and Lucia Angelucci are based in Rome and have deep sense of commitment towards the marginalised communities. Most of those working with the international land coalition know the deep commitment of Lucia as she worked diligently to ensure things are normal when any event started. She is retired after working nearly 15 years with International Land Coalition yet we continued to be in touch. I thought a conversation with Lucia was essential as that provide her own world view, her experiences and observation about the movement which she was a part. Livia Celini work with Food and Agriculture Organisation, Rome but also volunteer for global charities in the form of 'Fasting For Food' campaign which support smaller initiatives at different part of the world. She was not part of the International Land Coalition but came in touch with me through friends. She was concerned about conditions of the marginalised and she provided her thoughts on the issue and how those who can afford to help others should do so as Fasting For Food has been doing for so many years. The initiative of the Fasting For Food is extremely inspiring and shows how we all should contribute as per our capacities to fight against poverty and hunger.

Aminata Mbaye Fall is a journalist based in Dakar and a conversation with her provide us the glimpse of social system there and what women think about it. She was actually recording a conversation with me and I thought it would be interesting to request her to respond some of my questions regarding women's issues in Senegal and what does young woman like her think about the same. She responded all these questions by email but it gave enough hint about the role and thinking of women in Senegal.

The conversations with Mohammad Cheick Mkhaitir from Mauritania and Mr Raj Mohan from Surinam are not necessarily related to land rights movement or issues but they belong to the families who were victims of 'crime against humanity', the issue of slavery and indentured labours, a dirty and exploitative chapter of the history of Colonial powers. The conversations give us their first-hand experience in their own countries. Mohammad Cheick Mkhaitir belongs to an untouchable community, victim of slavery in Mauritania, who was able to get good education which became the reason of his exploitation and intimidation. He was sentenced to death for alleged blasphemy. Now living in exile in France after efforts were made to release him, his interview exposes the social culture system and how slavery is still prevalent. The other conversation is with Mr Raj Mohan, who is a poet, lyricist and singer in Bhojpuri language based in Amsterdam right now but his parents belonged to indentured labour who were taken by the British colonial masters to Surinam in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Important to understand how people still kept their language deep to their heart despite all efforts to decimate them. Remember, indentured labour or contract labour was 'discovered' by British immediately after they 'officially' 'abolished' slavery. They need cheap labour for their big sugarcane farms and it was only 'possible' from their colonies. Most of these labours were actually Dalits and other marginalised communities who were not even told as where they would be taken. Those who went to Surinam were informed that it was some land of Hindu god Lord Shri Ram. They lived in utterly despicable conditions. In fact, colonial government should be asked to pay reparation for both slaveries and indentured labour.

India is a land of social movements where land rights issues are inherently related to identity and autonomy issues. A conversation with well known author, activist and Adivasi leader Gladson Dungdung explain how the mainstream movements have betrayed the Adivasi cause and why it is important to give space to Adivasis voices. It is an extremely important conversation to understand the Adivasi issues particularly that in the Jharkhand region and how these issues have remained unaddressed so far as well as the attempt to criminalise the movement by the authorities.

Dr Burnad Fatima is Founder-coordinator of Tamilnadu Dalit Woman Forum and Society for Rural Education and Development, Tamilnadu. A passionate fighter for the Land Rights of Dalits, Burnad bring you

experiences of Dalit woman's fight for dignity and land rights. A conversation with her brings out diverse hidden factors of Dalit women's land rights struggle. The other important conversation in this series is with Ms Jyothi Raj, one of the founders of Dalit Panchayat movement in Tumkur, Karnataka along with her partner M C Raj, both of them fought for the land rights of the Dalits and got thousands of hectares of land for the Dalits.

Prof K.S.Chalam is one of the leading intellectuals of Dalit Bahujan movement in India. A former Member of Union Public Service Commission, he was Vice-Chancellor of Dravidian University, Kuppam, Andhra Pradesh. Prof Chalam has authored many books, numerous research papers on the economic issues of Dalits including their land rights. Conversation with him give comprehensive understanding the economic issues of Dalits-Bahujan communities in India often neglected by elite intellectuals and activists.

Mr Manas Jena is a leading Dalit Rights activist from Odisha whose has focussed on not only land rights but also on mining and climatic changes issues. A prolific writer, Manas is also a columnist with several prestigious newspapers in Odisha. A Conversation with him give details of land rights vis a vis Dalits in Odisha.

This volume of Conversation will provide you details of land issues and their close relationship with indigenous people, Dalits and discriminated people world over. It has been a satisfactory journey for me since I gave it a thought to work on this volume as I was able to get activists, thinkers, global leaders from so many countries and continent at one platform so that the readers enjoy the opinion and experiences from different part of the world. This diversity was the most powerful feature of International Land Coalition which taught me to respect and understand the local knowledge system. It is also important to understand that a large number of land and resource rights activists interviewed here are from outside the International Land Coalition network. I tried to contact many other important people working on land and food rights campaign including those international organisations, and individuals who have been working in this field for years but unfortunately, they did not respond. I tried them many times but failed. I still miss conversation from Latin America where I tried to speak to them but so far could not hear anything from them.



I made my effort and hope that whenever we discuss the issue of racism, caste discrimination, climate crisis then land is the most common link with them. I sincerely hope that readers will find this book on conversation useful for their work.



# ROWSHAN JAHAN MONI

Association for Land Reforms and Development, Dhaka,  
Bangladesh

*Vested Property Act continue to threaten the minorities and  
create an environment for their displacement and migration*

Ms. Rowshan Jahan is the Deputy Executive Director, Association for Land Reforms and Development, Bangladesh and has extensive exposure to different countries of South Asia, Pacific and Central Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin/ America in different capacities to carrying out responsibilities bestowed to her. As a development practitioner she has started her career from difficult rural settings of Bangladesh and has been taking challenging capacities for different I/NGOs in Bangladesh as well as for regional and global platforms, UN-process. Over the years, her expertise developed in the areas of Human Rights, Land and women's land rights in particular, Good Governance and decentralization, Conflict Resolution and Peace Building, Climate change and natural disaster management, Partnership Development, International policy Advocacy and networking. In recognition of her voluntary work in 1988, received the 'HEARTS OF GOLD' award by the BBC Television for the worldwide volunteer service.

She wrote investigative/fact-finding reports, several case studies, articles, and keynote papers to be presented nationally and internationally. Most of her work and subsequent report/literatures mainly focused on Human Rights, particularly land and agricultural rights of women, Indigenous peoples, small scale farmers and their rights to land, water, forest. Unequal resource rights and land-based discrimination including violence against women are the prime focus of her work, queried for Gender/ justice and peace.

Her affiliation includes Governing Board member of Asian NGO Coalition for Agriculture and Rural Development-ANGOC, Manila. Chairperson of the Executive Board of a Netherlands based INGO named SLOPB working in Bangladesh. One more is the Executive Committee member of an NGO named Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Center-BDPC. She served as civil society Co-Chair of International Land Coalition-ILC, Rome (2013-2015 terms). Her association with “SANGAT”, “Stand for Her Land-S4HL” and “Property for Her”, are feminist networks and or campaigns working for gender justice, equality and peace in South Asia.

**How has Covid 19 affected the livelihood of the marginalised communities particularly the landless people in Bangladesh?**

The first case of COVID-19 in Bangladesh was identified on 8th March 2020, its now more than a year country has experienced number of emerging challenges ever its history. During the crisis, two key features related to life and livelihood came into the surface are fragility of the health sector and the sources of livelihood of the marginalized poor in the rural as well as urban sector. Altogether, COVID-19 doubled the hardcore poverty rate, particularly the landless and other marginalized rural people.

There is a conservative estimation by some eminent economist that a large number of people whose lives and livelihoods are dependent on fragile job nature have been thrown into extreme poverty. As a consequence, the extreme poverty rate of the country has been doubled and increased from 24% to 40%.

At the beginning of Covid-19 pandemic, a significant percent of off farming workers who had lost their job/earnings in the cities, immediately moved to the rural to lessen their burden of paying for urban citizen facilities like house rent, utilities etc. Many of them had tried to engage in the agricultural activities that had impacted negatively on the daily wage of the existing agriculture labourers, particularly women farmers/ day labourer's. Their work been taken away by the returned mail workers. Indigenous (Garo community) girls from Madhupur, Tangali, who used to work in the beauty parlours in Dhaka, representing 6.8 percent of the total community have lost income sources as the beauty parlours across the country had been shut down due to COVID-19 pandemic. Though some

could return to their previous work but most of them are either working as seasonal day labourers in agriculture or living in misery without any work.

In the first six months of the Covid 19, January to June 2020, there had been 601 cases of rape, 107 deaths of women due to domestic violence, 103 incidents of sexual harassment leading to nine suicides, and 680 child abuse cases across the country, according to the report of an NGO named “Ain o Salish Kendra”.

Due to intermittent lockdown, mobility restrictions, farmers and agri. labours in rural areas have been facing weighty sufferings, from tilling to harvesting paddy, the main crop with other food grains, fruits and vegetables. They did not get a fair price for their produces due to the limited options for mobility /transportation to the cities.

Women from poor families were in difficulties to meet the daily needs, especially to arrange food for the family

Although, in the last harvesting season, the Ministry of Agriculture sanctioned Tk. 110 crore to help farmers pay for harvesting machines at a subsidized rate, the real benefits remained a question due to lack of transparent and accountable distribution process. Corruption and misappropriation also reported in the national print and electronic Media. Isolated rural families in Haor ( large water bodies/lakes) and some remote Char land (island), Indigenous communities in the Hill, plain and coastal areas were the worst sufferers of hunger and poverty having been excluded from accessing emergency relief package provided by the government.

**What has been the government response to this ? Has it been able to contain the marginalisation of people from escalating or things are going from bad to worst ?**

To address the emergency situation, The Prime Minister announced a fiscal stimulus worth of Tk. 50 billion (84 Tk. = 1 USD), on March 25, 2020 (equivalent to 0.2% of GDP) for export industries to mitigate the negative impact of Covid-19 pandemic in the national economy. Apart from these, the Prime Minister has announced a new stimulus package of Tk. 5 billion for farmers to boost up agricultural production at the backdrop of the Covid-19. The Prime Minister said, “Small and medium-scale farmers in rural areas will get loans from the fund, at 5 percent interest, and they can

use the money for producing agricultural products like food grains, vegetable, fruits, fish and poultry etc.”

In June 2020, the Bangladesh government declared its annual national budget of Tk. 568,000 crore targeting highly optimistic GDP growth of 8.2% for FY20- 21. The government had kept block allocation Tk. 100 billion to fulfil emergency requirements to combat the Covid-19 pandemic but it was not clear how the amount of budget would be spent, questions remained on the transparent and accountable distribution of the announced stimulation packages to the landless and small-scale family farmers who are really involved in producing agricultural products as mentioned.

**How important will be the Land Reform agenda in the coming days to handle the crisis emerging out of the Covid 19?**

Amid this COVID-19 pandemic, a sudden collapse of country's two major economic sectors – RMG (ready made garments) and remittance – has revealed that the country must focus on agriculture not only for ensuring food security and livelihood but to accommodate the urban and foreign returned workers in the informal sector of agriculture. The renowned economists and development professionals are constantly claiming that as an impact of COVID-19, class structure of the society has started to change, and a large number of people particularly middle and lower middle-income group whose lives and livelihoods are dependent on fragile formal as well as informal sectors such as agriculture and RMG have been thrown into extreme poverty. As a consequence, it is estimated that the extreme poverty rate in the country has been doubled from 24 to 40%. And as a trickle-down effect, rural farmers who are mostly dependent on rural economy, particularly women, indigenous peoples and day labourers, lost their work in the city fallen in acute poverty trap.

Covid has reconfirmed that agriculture is the backbone of the economy. As per government report, this the single sector where 40.6% of the country's total labour force is engaged and women constitutes 72.6% of them. This feature quite justifies the need for comprehensive land reforms of the country to ensure equitable access of the landless and poor men and women farmers to private and public agricultural land. Land ownership of

the country is highly unequal. Different research showed that 80% of the land is in the hand of 20% who are mostly absentee.

After the evolution of Zamindary (landlord) System, private ownership was established through EBSAT-Act 1950. (East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy). Afterwards, land ceiling has been fixed and refixed several times which is at this moment 60 Bigha = 20 acres is the highest ceiling of agricultural land in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, there is no ceiling fixed for the urban land. For inheritance, the country doesn't follow sharia Islamic law but is guided by Muslim personal law which is discriminatory against women. Research done by Dr. Abul Barakat showed that only 4-5% of the women in this country have effective control over land whereas 72.6% of the total agriculture labour force is women who are not formally recognized as farmer, consequently deprived from accessing all agri. related financial and technical supports like bank loan, technical education on modern agriculture so on. This put forward the legitimate demand for comprehensive land reform means reforms in the ownership to ensure title deed in the name of real (men and women) farmers, administrative reforms including digitalization of land record and Survey to make the whole system transparent and accountable.

Drastic reforms in the management of public land, known as “Khas land” is very crucial to enable access of the landless poor to the land. There is a *Khas land* policy in place but there is lack of political commitment and willingness in its implementation. New trends in allocation of Khas (public) land are developing mega projects for Export Processing Zones-EPZ, allocation for infrastructure, power plant etc. deprives landless farmers accessing them to land for cultivation. Though this policy allows husband and wife to get title deed in their joint name but widowed and abandoned women are not eligible to claim if they don't have an “able bodied son”. Land reform must address this to remove from the policy and for the legal protection this policy must be turned into law.

**What is the land situation in Bangladesh particularly in relations to indigenous people ?**

Indigenous peoples are 1.5 to 2% of the total population who are living in the Hills as well as in the plain. Plain land IPs in the country believe in customary rights which is not codified in to law, so land rights of plain land IPs do not have proper legal protection. As a consequence, they continue

to lose their ancestral land, often targeted to become victims of a range of violence, sometimes cross the border to the neighboring country. Poverty rate among the hill and plain land IPS is always much higher than any others which counts up to 63%. However, land rights of the Indigenous people in three districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts-CHT is governed following 1900 Regulation, preordained to protect the IPs land rights but due to demographic engineering which promoted the push in of the main land non-IPs /settlers to CHT, militarization together continued to deny their land rights. After 10 years of insurgency, a Peace Accord been signed in 1997 which well contained the issues of land dispute resolution along with others. Afterwards, a Land Dispute Resolution Commission-LDRC is established to resolute the long-standing land disputes in CHT but full functioning of the LDRC is still a big question. Due to land grab attempt, human rights violation of the IPs is a very common phenomenon that leads to evction, murder, rape, abduction and disappearance. So-called development interventions for eco pack, resorts and hotels for tourism continue to narrowed down their space, evict them from their territories.

**Do you have specific data related to the condition of Dalits in Bangladesh in relation to land and livelihood ?**

The Constitution of Bangladesh declares that the all Citizen have equal rights for and prohibits discrimination by the state on the ground of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth in article 28(1). But despite this Constitutional declaration, unfortunately, the state failed to ensure equal rights of its Citizens.

Approximately 8.5 million Dalit people are living in Bangladesh. Among the marginalized population, socially excluded communities (Dalit) and ethnic minorities are considered as extremely vulnerable communities in Bangladesh. The Socially excluded group (Dalits) faces discrimination at all levels of social interaction: from entering barber shops, from temples to schools. Actually, these communities are in backward situation in compare to other communities in respect of social, cultural, educational and other aspects. They have limited access and scope to service, land rights, and are discriminated in many other ways. These discriminations deprived them from Citizen's rights and result in extreme vulnerability and exclusion from the mainstream society.



**How is a landless and marginalised person defined in your statute books ? Who is a small farmer and who are big farmers?**

As per statute book, having less than 0.30 decimal of homestead land is defined as landless.

The country has an official definition of smallholder farmers having land up to 150 decimals. Land ratio is not big that they can be categorized as big farmers.

**Are there big farmers in Bangladesh? If yes, then who are they? Is there any law which defines the upper limit for holding individual land such as ceiling laws in India ?**

Over 45% of total households (about 35.5 million) of Bangladesh is agriculture farm households (about 16.6 million—households operating 5 or more than 5 decimal of cultivated area); most of these households are marginal and small-holder. A CGAP working paper (2016) on national survey on smallholder households in Bangladesh finds that there is heavy dependence on agricultural income among smallholder households; they are vulnerable to weather-related events that threaten their agricultural activities, and typically they have few, if any resources at their disposal when these events occur; a majority of smallholder farmers are not financially included; most older smallholders are committed to farming and need information and tools to plan their agricultural and financial lives etc.;

According to the same survey, smallholder farmers typically own their land; more than half of smallholders possess a lease or certificate, with 12% possessing their land according to customary law; 11% of smallholders have communal land. Nine in 10 smallholders own or rent less than 1 hectare of land & nearly a one-tenth own between 1 & 2 hectares;

More than half of Bangladeshi smallholders grow more than one crop for both consumption and selling. 12% of smallholders grow three crops and 12% grow four crops. Paddy is the most important crop to smallholders. Other crops include maize, jute, potato, onion, pulse etc.;

Major sources of credit of smallholder farmers include NGOs, MFIs, Cooperative society/Samity, and various non-institutional or personal avenues like mahajans, friends or relatives, dadan businessmen. They also get some loans from different government institutions like Rural

Development Board, Department of Youth Development, Department of Women Affairs, Department of Social Services etc. They hardly get loans from private and public commercial or specialized banks;

Could you please share with us about the work done by ALRD ? When was it formed and who were the founders, its aim, object and mission. How many member organisations are part of it.

Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) was established in January 1991 with the aim to promote and strengthen land rights and agrarian reform in Bangladesh for the poor and marginalized communities. It succeeds the NGO Coordination Council for Land Reform Program (NCCLRP) which was set up in 1987 at the initiative of few leading national and international NGOs operating in Bangladesh.

Led by Mr. Shamsul Huda, presently Executive Director of ALRD, NCCLRP was founded to support and undertake complementary initiatives to the Government khas land (Government's land) distribution program. Its key programme initiatives comprised of raising awareness of the grassroots people on the relevant laws, policies and guidelines of the government and as well as mobilization of the NGOs in the distribution process of khas land among the landless and rural poor. NCCLRP had notable success in this initiative and to further carry forward this important undertaking, the founders decided to formally set up an independent organization.

As successor organization to NCCLRP, from its very beginning ALRD has been working on mobilizing the grassroots people with the civil society as allies for claiming and establishing the rights of the poor and marginalized communities. In the subsequent years, this scope and mandate was further expanded both in terms of target population, geographical focus, and as well in areas of interventions. This Strategic Plan reflects the organizational ambition of ALRD with further focus on new areas of interventions and as well targeted population, while drawing concrete lessons from its recent experience and as well as feedback from its stakeholders.

ALRD being a single focused right based national networking organization, has more than 220 partners, working all over the country towards achieving its vision, a democratic, secular, pluralistic and inclusive

Bangladesh free of discrimination that promotes sustainable development for all its citizens and where equality in exercising rights, use and control over land and other natural resources for all is realized.

This proposal aims to strengthen the capacity of journalists, land and human rights defenders and CSOs activists for adopting strategies for their physical and psychosocial security using tools and techniques of digital security as well as other professional and personal security measures. Another aim is to strengthen their capacity to confront threats, misappropriation or act of aggression and to claim for their right to defend human rights in a nonviolent manner.

**What is the work which you feel remains missing or unachieved?**

The land and agrarian reforms in Bangladesh remain an unfinished agenda and the fact remains that an overwhelming agrarian society like Bangladesh will not suddenly transform into an industrial and manufacturing base. Both for the food security of the common citizen and for employment, agriculture will remain key pillar in the near future.

Reportedly, 80% of court cases in Bangladesh are related to land disputes litigations. In most of these cases, the poor have rarely access to defend them. This situation calls for legal and social justice to them in establishing their rights over land and natural resources.

Despite the vibrant history of the civil society in Bangladesh, it is also beset with problems. It is often fragmented along partisan political affiliations, class and socio-economic interest and religious lines. Much more importantly, it is largely also unorganized and lack organizational, advocacy and lobbying capacity. Given this context, ALRD will continue with its policy advocacy and campaign for the country's comprehensive land reform so that justiciable land rights of landless, Women, customary rights of indigenous people-IPs and minorities including Dalits and transgender community are established.

**How do you look at Women's land rights issues? Can they own individual property? How many women own agricultural land in Bangladesh?**

Though women constitute 72.6% of the total agricultural labour force, their rights to land is highly disproportionate. According to Dr. Barkat et

al eds., 2017), only 15.8 percent of land at household level in rural areas is owned by women. Another study has shown that the effective ownership of land of women is even smaller; a maximum of 4 percent rural land is 'effectively' owned by the women (Barkat et al., 2015). Average amount of agricultural land (including water-bodies) owned by men in the rural area is 46.2 decimal, which is only 7.2 decimal among women (Barkat et al eds., 2017). There is no bar for the women to own individual property. They can purchase land in their name but in reality, hardly women, particularly rural women can afford to buy land as land is as precious as gold.

**What are the biggest hurdles in achieving women's equality in your country ? How has the constitution and law responded to it ?**

The law of inheritance related issues in Bangladesh is governed by personnel law based on the respective religion of the concerned individual. there is yet no specific policy of women's rights and access to land, not even in the case of government's allocation of land for the underprivileged women (Barkat et al., 2015).

According to the Muslim Shariah, a Muslim woman has some limited right to inherit property. Under the Muslim law, the wife (or wives have taken together) get one-eighth if there is one child, and one-fourth if there be no child from the estate of her husband though the husband gets exactly double. Mother gets from the estate of her son's one-sixth, when there is a child of her son or when there are two or more brothers or sisters or one brother or one sister of her son, and one-third when there is no child and not more than one brother or sister of her son. On the other hand, the father gets from the estate of his son one-sixth if there be a child of his son and in the absence of any child of his son, he gets the entire residue after satisfying other sharers' claim, and so on and so forth. On the other hand, whatever limited access to inherit has been provided to a Muslim woman, in practice, she rarely gets what she is legally entitled to, due mainly to patriarchal system. The practice of execution of ownership right on the land by women is also enrooted in the cultural customs of the Muslim society. The established values and norms reveal that a "good sister" should surrender her share on paternal property in favour of her brothers. This also discourages women from asserting their rights. Although women can inherit and/or own a part of her father's and husband's landed property, they seldom exercise their rights to do so.

In general, Hindu law does not have any provision for the women to inherit, except in few extraordinary and exceptional circumstances. Hindu law, culture, and patriarchal society deny Hindu women as an individual identity. In Bangladesh, existing Hindu law is yet to be modified. The women do not get any right from their customary law rather they suffer from discrimination. In Hindu law, there are two systems of inheritance namely; Mitakshara and Dayabhaga system. The Dayabhaga School of law governs the system of inheritance for the Hindus which only gives the women life interest in the property. In respect of Sirdhan (women's property), a Hindu woman can deal with her property in any way she desires and after her death, that property will pass on to her own heirs. The maximum entitlement of a Hindu woman according to the law ends only with the right to be maintained by the males during the paternal side, and husband's side after her marriage till her death.

The indigenous women face discrimination, social exclusion, structural marginalization, gender identity, and systemic oppression in the patriarchal society. However, they have far greater social mobility than non-indigenous women in rural societies, in terms of inheritance, legal and political rights, decision-making powers and so forth, and their situation is little better than non-indigenous women.

Basically, the marginalized women who do not have their own land work on other people's land as day labourers. But there is wage discrimination between male and female labour. Even though women are employed longer than men, they are victims of wage inequality. According to the latest data from the government's Agricultural Information Service, women do not get any remuneration for their 45.7 percent given to labour in the agriculture sector and also for remaining 54.3 percent, the remuneration they get is less than the market price. So, apparently the increase of women's participation in the agriculture sector seems to be the empowerment of women, but the behind story is the advantage of long-time female labor with low wages. That is why, it is important to create effective policies, strategies, programs and action plans by the government and concerned authorities to ensure better working environment and opportunity for rural women, which can improve their standard of living (Barkat et al., 2014).

I remember ALRD has done some wonderful work on Enemy Property Act and its misuse. Can you share with us what exactly is it and how has it been misused?

Half a century back, in the aftermath of the India-Pakistan War in 1965, the Pakistani government promulgated the ordinance XXIII followed by the Defense of the then Pakistan, subsequently made into a law, called the Enemy Property Act, adopted as a measure to confiscate land properties of individuals and households belonging to Pakistani citizens who crossed the border to India from Pakistan during 17 days war between the countries, stayed over there for some time and hence were considered enemies to Pakistan. Right from the promulgation of the Act, allowed the government to become the custodian of all the enlisted enemy or vested properties. This single law continues to be served as an ominous instrument to blatantly usurp the properties of the country's religious minority, mainly, Hindus, Christians and IPs for next three decades. In Bangladesh, liberated from Pakistan in 1971, known to be a secular country, unfortunately the government repealed the ordinances but re-instated the law with a different name: Vested Property Act. Its enforcement continued against the Hindu minority and almost in every case, this law served as an instrument to grab their land and other properties by the vested powerful quarters through some corrupt bureaucracy.

Until 1947, before the partition of India and Pakistan, Hindus were about 33% of the total population of Bangladesh (then Pakistan). The figure came down subsequently in mid-1990s to 10%. At present, around 8% (Census report, 2011). This percentage translates into a staggering figure of 5.3 million Hindus, the equivalent of 1 million households that were affected with 1.64 million acres of land confiscated by the State.

By one estimate, this single law alone might have aggrieved as many as 6 million people of the minority communities, resulting in confiscation of 2.6 million acres of land from 1965 to 2008. According to an estimate drawn from the study of Professor Dr. Abul Barkat, 40% of the Hindu families in the country have been affected by the Vested Property Act since it was first decreed in 1965, threats and attack on them created hostile environment, continued with the displacement and forced migration to the bordering country, India.

The study recorded the incidences of sexual violence perpetrated against women, included rape and murder, kidnapping, physical harassment in a wider scale. The manifestation of Vested Property return Act created a permanent vicious cycle the families, where women and girls in particular increasingly been victim of cross border migration and marriage for their safety. In 1992, immediately after the emergence of ALRD, a non-governmental right based national networking and advocacy organization, took up the campaign for the repeal of the Vested Property Act as a challenge. It was, however, a largely lone battle that hardly anyone in Bangladesh was willing to face. It was easy to draw strong discouragement, if not hostility from the government. In these circumstances, ALRD commissioned a study by a group of researchers to ascertain the prevailing situation. Despite the very substantial political risks of confronting powerful interest groups, both within and outside the government, ALRD launched the battle, continued with all of its advocacy campaign and lobby with the legislators. Movement promotion involving ALRD's 220 network partners and allies, progressive front, and media continued for the next decade. ALRD's persistent advocacy and lobbying saw the scrapping of the law and the enactment of a new law, the Vested Property (Return) Act in 2001. ALRD undertook steps to commission two complementary studies by the same team leader Dr. Barkat along with others to delve more in-depth into the issue of the VPA. Activism and campaign for amendments continued as the new law contained several serious loopholes. But far significantly, the political environment turned down with the party power changed in 2001 national election where the government had opted to bypass the implementation of the Vested Property Act through an amendment. ALRD re-strategized its efforts to combine more strength through coordinating other on going campaigns with the purpose of creating more pressure for the re-amendment in favour of the victims. After six years, in 2008, the country's political scenario changed again with the change of the political party, creating new hopes. ALRD facilitated a series of conferences and policy dialogues with high level of ministers, public representatives involving victims, leaders and representatives from all walks. It mobilized both print electronic and online media, and engaged civil society members to raise public awareness on the issues linked with the Vested Property (Return) Act. Finally, the government passed the Vested Property Return (Amendment) Act in 2011, classified into two categories, named schedule "A" (ka) and schedule

“B”(kha) of property to be returned. Subsequently tribunals and district committees were formed, formed; about half a million applications seeking legal redress were submitted by the victims. However, the piles of applications filed with the tribunals remained mostly unheard. ALRD, facilitated the process to support the Vested Property Return Act Monitoring Cell to track the Implementation with a round-the-clock hotline to its secretariat, within ALRD’s premiseshouse. The victims could call and seek legal counselling, and obtain support and advice instantly. Afterwards, the government issued circulars specifying rules to clarify the implementation of the new law and from 2011 to 2013 the parliament adopted four amendments, the last being the Vested Property Return Bill (Second amendment), which annulled the Schedule-B (means property enlisted as VP but out of government custody and under illegal occupation), quashed about 250,000 cases and paved the way for regaining access to approximately half a million acres of land. According to annual report of the Land Ministry, Government of Bangladesh, 118,173 cases have been filed with Vested Property Return Tribunals. An estimated amount of 26,224.195 acres land were released following tribunal’s verdict and total of 742,421.24168 acres of land had been released from “B” (Kha) schedule of Vested Property.

**Is land grab an issue in Bangladesh ? If yes, how is it affecting the lives of farmers and indigenous people ?**

Land grab is rampant. Government’s priority to implement hundreds of mega projects mainly for the industrial growth which shrunk the scope of agricultural farming by the landless and small-scale farming community. Grabbers are usually very influential in the society, includes political leader, business sector and individuals well linked with the power structure. Ground reality is religious and occupational Minority and indigenous communities land is at higher risk of grabbing cuz its easier to evict them from their ancestor land. Illegal occupation of Khas land by the local powerful is a very common feature in the rural setting.

**Food sovereignty or food security ? How do you fight to protect your farmers' rights and fight against hunger and malnutrition?**

Historically Bangladesh is known to be a country of small family farming. Around 16.5 million farming families representing 46.61 percent of the



total households are not only ensuring food of the 165 million people of the country but also managing our natural resources better, protecting our environment and contributing to achieve sustainable development, especially in rural areas. Over the period of time, 82 percent of the Bangladesh's farmers become landless. Along with the land conversion for off farming purposes, Powerful vested quarters occupied/grabbed huge amount of land including agricultural land.

Within this, increase in the agricultural production continued in Bangladesh. This happened due to small farmers engagement in this. Bangladesh is now self-reliant on the staple food which is rice. Also potato, vegetable and fish. It ranked fourth in global rice production, third in fresh water fish and fourth in vegetable.

Though the small/family farmers have been ensuring food security for the nation but remained as one of the most neglected work forces in the country. ALRD have been doing policy advocacy and mobilization for strengthening the demand side and also to ensure the accountability of the service providers.

The country does not have any comprehensive national land policy. Major policies on land or agrarian reform & agriculture include National Agriculture Policy 2018, National Land Use Policy 2001, National Food Policy 2006, National Jute Policy 2011, Bio-Safety Rules 2012, Bangladesh Water Act 2013, Safe Food Act 2013, National Nutrition Policy 2015, 8th Five Years Plan, Sustainable Development Goals (2016-2030), Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100, Fertilizer Management Act 2006 (Amended in 2018), Integrated small cultivation act 2017, Ground Water Management Act 2018, Management and Settlement of Agricultural Khas Land, 1997, Non-agricultural Khas Land Management and Settlement Policy 1995, State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, 1950 etc.



# MOHAMMAD KAMALUDDIN

Association for Realisation of Basic Needs, Dhaka Bangladesh

*Movement for language led to war of liberation in Bangladesh*

Moammad Kamaluddin is a passionate developmental activist and one of the founders of Association for Realisation of Basic Needs (ARBN), Dhaka Bangladesh. He is one of the oldest members of the International Land Coalition and has participated in various Global and Asian Land forums. Kamal Bhai was also witness to the historic Bangladesh movement and as a student participated in the liberation struggle.

**How did you join the social movement in Bangladesh? What was the reason and when ?**

My involvement with student politics as an activist in the University of Dhaka during my student life in the 1960's and 1970's inspired me to join social movement. The prevailing socio- cultural and political – economic condition of Pakistan especially of the then East Pakistan now Bangladesh also needed social movement to redress the sufferings of the people.

**What was your childhood about? Tell us about your parents and your village.**

I was born in a village situated on the bank of a river named the Meghna Dhonagoda of Bangladesh, about 70 km south-east of the capital Dhaka. It takes about 4 hours by bus and 5 hours by motor launch to reach Dhaka from our village. Our village is blessed with fertile soils capable of producing crops round the year, river, high ways and roads. I belonged to those children of this world who do not have childhood. I lost my childhood with sudden demise of my parents in my early childhood. My widowed mother sailed the boat of our family consisting of my sister, my brother and myself against the current in inclement weather. In the

meanwhile, my uncles from both side of my mother and father also died before my parents death. My mother with her chronic asthma, could hardly manage adequate food for us. In many occasion, we had to go to bed hungry. From time to time, our relatives from the village and from other villages used to help us. Therefore, we grew in hunger and poverty and they were part of my childhood . In other words, we lost our childhood to poverty and hunger. We are two brothers and one sister. My sister –Qudsia Begum is elder than me . I am in the middle and my brother Muhammed Mohi Uddin Mollah is younger than me . My father-Hazrat Ali Mollah left us with the world when I was just five years old, my sister was seven years and my brother was two years old. My mother Fatema Begum orphaned us when my sister was 12 years, I was 10 years and my brother was 5 years old. My cousins, my aunts and my father's friends helped us a lot in our childhood and looked after us.

**How old were you during the Bangladesh liberation movement and what are your memories about it ?**

I was about 19 years old and I was a honours student at the Department of Sociology University of Dhaka, when our great liberation war started on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March 1971. I was an active participant of our liberation war as I was also a student activist of Dhaka university. I was responsible for organizing and mobilizing the students, youths , peasants and workers and the masses in support of the six points demands of Awami League-AL led by Banga Bandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, father of the nation, as he steered all the movements from 1947 to 1971 along with other leaders against the exploitations, autocracy and military dictatorial rules of the Pakistanis just began with our great language movement in 1947 after the withdrawal of the British from India creating two states - India and Pakistan.

The Pakistani army with the help of their collaborators in Bangladesh known as razakars, albadars, alshams etc. killed more than 30,00,000 innocent people and raped more than 300,000 women and girls during the 9 months long arms struggle of the Bengali against the barbarous Pakistani army in 1971. In fact ,75 million Bengali people (Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and indigenous people of the hills and mountains and plain lands) of Bangladesh (the then East Pakistan) were freedom fighters and took part in our liberation war in many ways . So, it was very

easy for us to defeat the Pakistani just in nine months of arms struggle. We achieved our victory on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1971 by defeating the killer Pakistani army, although the USA, China and Saudi Arabia were against our liberation war and resisted our victory by supplying and selling arms and ammunition to the brutal Pakistanis, but the common people of those countries were very much supportive to our liberation struggle .

When Bangladesh came into being, it was not merely the issue of language but also of Land Reforms that never happened. What is the status of it in Bangladesh. Has there been any sincere efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger ?

Through the language movement that started just after the division of India in 1947, seeds for our independence were sown, and movement for language led us to the war of independence of 1971. Although Bengali people constitute about 56% of the total Pakistani population, Pakistani ruler in 1947 declared that Urdu shall be the mother language of Pakistan although none of the Pakistani in those days could speak Urdu. So, the Bengali revolted peacefully against this unjust decision of Pakistani ruler – Jinnah and continued the struggle systematically up to 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1971 till the freedom of Bangladesh was achieved. Therefore, the movement for language of the Bengali people taught us to protest and revolt against all forms of injustices including inequality and indignation.

Yes, our liberation war of 1971 was committed to justice, peace and progress. Accordingly. four pillars –Democracy, Bengali Nationalism, Secularism and Socialism were accepted as four basic principles for running the State affairs and were enshrined in the constitution of Bangladesh. Accordingly, land reform policy was an important agenda for the Govt. led by our founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1972.’ The government had decided to distribute khas land (state owned land as well as ceiling surplus land) among landless peasants, said Land Minister Abdur Rab Serniabat on May,1972. Under this scheme , initially, three lakh (Three hundred thousand) landless peasants in the country will get land for cultivation purposes, The minister further said that the peasants will not be required to pay any fees for obtaining khas land. The total number of landless peasants in the country was 26 lakh (26 hundred thousand). Currently, the government has 4 lakh 62 thousand acres of khas land available for distribution.

Are Land Ceiling Laws active in Bangladesh? I mean is there any effort by the government to take away land which has been illegally grabbed by the power elite. Is there any upper limit for keeping agricultural land in your country?

Yes, the government led by the founding father of the nation Banga Bandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman just after the liberation, introduced land reform policy with limit for cultivable and non-cultivable land, perhaps, 60 and 100 bighas respectively (1 bigha=33 decimals). But at one stage of his rule, he wanted to go for socialist model for economic development of Bangladesh according to his commitment to the independence war. Unfortunately in 1975 after two and half years of independence, the anti liberation forces of Bangladesh led by USA killed Sheikh Mujib along with his only brother, his wife, three sons, two daughter-in-laws, nephews and other near and dear ones of his family members on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1975 before implementing his progressive policies including land reform. Later on the military rulers ruled the country with no particular focus on land reforms. However, one general during his rule in 1982 to 1990 introduced a land reform policy but that was also was not implemented properly. Therefore, land grabbers did not have to lose their grabbed land and in the meanwhile, taking advantage of the loopholes of laws and bylaws and bribing the bureaucracies the land grabbers could manage more land under their possessions. As a result, more than 40% of our 170 million people are functionally landless and live in perpetual poverty and hunger today.

Bangladesh has become a role model for many countries particularly after the 'success' of Microfinance groups specifically promoted among women. A critique of it also emerged that it was merely to keep the Western corporations happy who wanted to invest in Bangladesh and not much really changed for the poor. What would you say about this?

Yes, the western world once used to see the solutions of the problems facing Bangladesh lies with successful implementation of microcredit. Anyway, after about fifty years of the independence of Bangladesh and forty years of the massive implementation of microcredit all most every nook and corner of Bangladesh, all indicators of development would suggest that more than forty percent people of Bangladesh are still under poverty level and they were functionally landless labourers, share-croppers and workers. The commitment of our great liberation war of 1971 to

provide land to the landless tillers and water bodies to the fishing communities could not be materialized . As a result, poverty and hunger persist among them although they were the prime movers of our rural-urban economies.

You have a secular lifestyle. Can you share with us the biggest influence on you and why ?

Our great liberation war taught us to be secular and secularism was one of the state policy of Bangladesh.

How did you get married? Was it an arranged marriage? Did you ever face threat and intimidation from any quarter, political or religious leaders.

No, we knew each other before our marriage and we used work together before our marriage. No, perhaps because of our identity as persons from Muslim family there were no threat or intimidation.

Tell us something about ARBN. When was it formed, who were the people behind it. What does it do. The focus and its work areas.

The Association for Realisation of Basic Needs-ARBAN was founded on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 1984. I took the initiative in founding it along with other close friends of mine . The name of the organization gives messages of its goals and objectives . We strongly believe that poverty and hunger are the real enemies of human being and they were man made. And they needed to be defeated for peace, progress and dignity of human being .

You have been with ILC since the beginning. What brought you to ILC. Can you explain about your association with ILC ?

We the people in Bangladesh historically were with land rights movement much before ILC was founded. Our close friends of India and Nepal were thinking of floating a South Asia based platform for organizations to advance united land rights movements in the south Asian region. Initially, our friend Krishna B. Ghimire ,(UNRISD), Ph.D. and author of ‘ Forest Or Farm? The Politics of Poverty And Land Hunger in Nepal, inspired us both morally and materially to go for effective South –Asian Platform for land and agrarian reform . Our comrade from India, Vidya Bhushan Rawat,

were intimately associated with this initiative before we associated and embarked on the initiatives of ILC.



# BHARAT SHRESTHA

College for Development Studies, Kathmandu, Nepal

*Land Reform is not merely land distribution but also ensuring it  
increases productivity through imparting knowledge*

Bharat Shrestha is an agricultural economist, a development academic with years of experience working with international organisations. He is the founder of College for Development Studies, Nepal. Bharat Shrestha is also one of the oldest members in the International Land Coalition Network and has worked on Community Forestry issues in Nepal.

**Share with us how did you come in touch with the International Land Coalition and how was the experience of those days.**

The year was in 1997 sometime in September-October while I was working with Agricultural Projects Services Centre (APROSC), one of the leading research institutions in South Asia mandated to work on agriculture and rural development. During that time, I used to formulate and coordinate the projects related to natural resources – land, forest and watershed management for agriculture development. Krishna Ghimire, the then professional from United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) visited APSOSC and held a meeting with the authority including me. Dr. Ghimire, the then coordinator of the proposed project, explained about what UNRISD is being coordinated and what he was supposed to do on a regional network basis in South Asia including in other regions of the globe. I shouldered for further work in relation to these activities and, remained in regular touch with him. I guess it was a year later in October 1998, we all who in touch with UNRISD were informed to gather for a meeting at ALRD, Dhaka for which each of the representatives were required to present the status report on land and land-

based issues. We did gather, talked and agreed to adopt a network to work together in South Asia for which ALRD would coordinate.

Dr. Ghimire was coordinating from UNRISD and we the members from Bangladesh, Nepal and India were in close touch. We required a non-government organization to work at the grassroots level with minimum resources for which APROSC could not do that and thus, MODE Nepal, a national NGO started working. Later after 6 months of Dhaka meeting, MODE Nepal organized a workshop first as regional assembly in Dhulikhel, Nepal and planned for the South Asia meet where Dr. Ghimire too came and that was the time when a greater camaraderie happened between South Asian countries.

Thereafter, we organized a number of workshops and conferences in Nepal, India and Bangladesh and travelled together to many parts. These were the formative years but of greater bonding.

**How has ILC grown and changed. As a member who has seen it from its inception, how do you see this change and growth?**

The year 1999 September was probably the turning point for the efforts we made for almost two years that we were gathered some 30-35 people, I guess, in a closed room where the university professors, international organization heads, high professionals, IFAD people in coordination with UNRISD led by Director Dr. Ghani, Dr. Ghimire who was supposed to be the research lead coordinator as we discussed for last two years and, we the NGO members from all regions from ANGOC and south Asian friends, Africa and South America. It was a formal opening of Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty (PCEHP), wow with big clapping and sharing joys. We came back full of enthusiasm and some thoughts of how to go further not on individual country basis but the south Asian region as a whole. This was our motto.

The initial thought and plan to work with the coordination of UNRISD however was dwindled later after 1999 Rome opening meeting. And, the activities that was thought about during 1997-98 was found changed where UNRISD had no role to play then I remember the year 1999-2000 when we started with small funds of the network on country basis especially to finding out the activities and organizations working on land and based issues. Something is better than nothing came into reality. By working for

couple of years the network where we started ourselves had created a different environment of brotherhood. We started digging out the land and land-based issues and disseminating in a network more through the electronic mails and occasional meets, has fund crisis but we tried to manage ourselves to meet, talk and trace out the ways. The environment was really never forgettable. A family approach was introduced, really natural and organic, cool and green, clean and secured, full of encouragement not fund based.

We started how to push up the network, we discussed at an individual level, in regional and general assembly. To bring the PCEHP up we used to present the papers and discussed in many regional and international conferences where we tried to prove the essence and stand of PCEHP. Bruce More, the PCEHP Director must be well appraised for his work and his way of war footing, courageous and supportive role to bring the network up in this stage. I personally never forget him, Annalisa Mauro and Dr. Rischard Trenchard who tied up from their possible efforts and their friendly approach and behaviour to motivate ourselves to make the network and PCEHP stronger and widespread.

### **What has been the biggest strength of ILC in your opinion?**

The PCEHP started changing its status from its inception in terms of member's growth and growth in regional coverage but with close environment. More than this, it laid a strong foundation knowledge and dissemination across the country and at regional level or globally. After renamed PCEHP to ILC in 2004, it further got momentum in establishing a strong base of strength to link with the government of member country.

After 2004, the member partners have been fast growing. Activities are being increased and networking further enhanced, National Engagement strategy (NES) has tied up the national based activities, well-coordinated and close links established with the government and the people. Awareness on land and land based issues has at local and central level among the government organization has tremendously taken the height and is bound to concern about the land issues. Regular NES meeting, regional and global assembly has brought people together and a pressure to the member countries. ILC's occasional evaluation and knowledge sharing has made the network a vibrant.

**What is the status of land reforms in Nepal? Is government keen on this or not.**

At least 3 high level land reform commissions were formed by the communist government and reports were submitted but the intention of the politicians was not for implementation but for taking the supports that the government is trying to do something.

In addition to the constitution of Nepal (2015) which seem to have well described and made some favourable provisions for the tenants, squatters and ending up of dual ownership, the government in recent years basically after the formation of majority government of NCP during last two years, the Act of 1964 made its 8 the amendment on reforming the land issues, safeguarding tenants, squatters, and land administrations. This looks the sufferer would gain since from they are in trouble but the question is its implementation. I don't think that there are no acts and laws to regulate but the problem is the commitment of the politicians.

Two major issues are in forward – the issues of tenants for which the government issued notices to apply for tenancy rights (you can refer this in the Google notices of Nepalese paper eg. Republic etc) giving a time of one year which again was given one more year and by next year the ministry is expected to settle tenancy management. Recently, the ministry has also formed a commission for 3 years to settle down the problems of squatters and so on.

Given the Acts and amendments promulgated since 1964, formation of commissions, bills tabled, election manifesto and so on, hopes are to be put in for favourable results but considering the times past decades after decades, one can vividly see the intentions of the politicians and system of bureaucracy.

The prime concern on land issues and reform in Nepal's case as elsewhere are (i) to take up the inactive capital and population weight from land and invest in other sectors that enhance economic development and, (ii) to distribute agricultural land to the real tillers and increase the productivity by distributing the appropriate knowledge, skills and inputs. Well, has all these been gained or in process to gain? No one has answer for this question. It is really far away to meet despite 8<sup>th</sup> amendment on Act and 17<sup>th</sup> amendment on rules and regulations of the Land Reform Act enacted

in 1964 by the then King Mahendra. There is nothing to be concerned who and which party ruled?

Nepal has done tremendous work on Community Forestry. Can it become a model to eradicate poverty? Kindly share your experiences on the same.

Nepal's farming system of small holders which accounts over 3/4, is composed of land, forest and water to ensure at least subsistence output for their survivability. Only land, therefore, is not sufficient to the small holder to cover up their daily needs at least to supplement their farm activities. Thus, they voluntarily submit themselves to protect, conserve and develop forest and gain either daily needs or try to make some commercial benefits.

Some 18,13,478 ha is under community forest on which 24,61,549 households through 19,361 forest user groups of the poor, landless, DalitDalits, women and rural households largely depends upon the forest resources for food, fuelwood, building materials, leaf litters for fertilizers and fodders for animals as the main source of their daily livelihoods. I have a separate paper though quite old but is comprehensive, will mail you.

How powerful are the people's movements in Nepal particularly related to land rights and their role in bringing land reform on the political agenda? Was it really them or the Maoist groups who brought it to the national agenda?

People's movement on land rights and there are lots of examples now that how the movement brought changes on land rights, particularly the women's movement which brought joint land ownership and land access to women that has risen up over 22% women having land ownership. The movement of landless and squatters brought government to listen to the voice and resulted to form the commission to solve the problems, even now just two weeks past a commission has been formed the real outcome is yet to be seen. For Guthi bill, the Newar communities stood against the government decision and now it is taken back. How rational it was is yet to be finalized.

How influential was ILC General Assembly in Nepal in 2009 when Prime Minister Prachanda participated and promised radical land

**reforms. How much land has been given in Nepal since the revolution happened and what is the status of poverty today?**

ILC general assembly of 2009 in Nepal was a great turning point in my view where at least the concern of the government on land made. It was a great pressure both to the politicians and the bureaucrats. The PM's commitment was shown through the formation of the commission and prepares the report. I don't know who to give the credit. Something started to bring the land issues in front and it was the several activities of the organizations working on land issues and people land rights either through ground activities or through the research studies and sharing findings with the government.

No land has yet been confiscated or taken from over ceiling. No distribution to the landless and if there such cases they were too old. A new commission to settle such problems has just been formed and the result has to be waited for another 3 years.

Not so drastic change in poverty is seen. The current poverty status is 25.1 % and, is early data but the situation might be even more than this now because the status shown is dependent upon remittances. If you see the intensity of poverty it is really aggravating.

**Any particular ILC event which you would like to talk about and share with us.**

ILC events those of the past were remained quite memorable for me in the sense that the gathering wherever in Nepal, India, couple of times in Philippines, Bolivia, Cambodia, Rome, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Africa, somehow gave me a feeling of ownership, commitment and network responsibility. In later part of the events though going on maybe in the same pace somehow bringing more of show of, money use or more of groupism. New members are emerging. I don't know how many organizations are appropriate. It has both strengths and weaknesses. The strengths are seen in terms of widespread network and pressures on country government and weakness on money matters in allocating among members without assessing the strengths of the organizations, just lobbying to each other.

# JAGAT BASNET

Community Self Reliance Centre, Kathmandu, Nepal

*Dalit movement in Nepal is still fragmented and therefore  
unable to give a collective fight for land rights.*

Jagat Basnet, PhD is a policy researcher, development practitioner and founding member of the Community Self-Reliance Centre (CSRC), the non-violence movement based social organization. He has been facilitating the land and agrarian rights movement in Nepal since 1994 mainly through the formation and promotion of peoples' organizations, Land Rights Forums for a comprehensive land and agrarian reform in 53 of the 77 districts. That has resulted in a people led land reform model. He is a strong believer of the power of peaceful activism operating with legally defined territories for making the land reform from the ground a reality. He brings 27 years of global and national experience working with leaders, activists, researchers and communities and also brings the experience working at executive level in program planning, negotiating, research, human resource management, national policy development, non-violence movement, facilitation and alliance building. Recently, he has obtained a PhD from Rhodes University, South Africa, on 'De-Peasantization Process in Nepal ' on 2019.

He has received several national and international awards for his contribution to Nepal's land and agrarian movement – in 2006, he received 'Maja Koene Social Activist Award' from India, in 2007 'Ashoka Fellowship Award 2007'; 'Farmer's Voice Award from ALINE, UK and Annual Human Rights Prize from Leitner Centre for International Law and Justice, USA in 2009.

He is also an Activist writer, who has co-authored many books, wrote numerous book chapters and articles in various journals, magazines, and newspapers related to Land and Agrarian Reforms.

What is the status of Land Reforms in Nepal? Has the government redistributed land? If yes, then how much data is available?

The land reform and land distribution agendas started in Nepal since 1950 with number of Land Reform Acts and regulations formulated but the fact of the matter is that there was no real land reforms in Nepal. After 1964, when the Land act was introduced, some of the lands that exceeded the ceiling limit were acquired and distributed, but that program lasted only for 2 years. Not much land has been acquired since then. As per the official data, 47962-10-0 Bighas<sup>1</sup> of land were acquired by imposing ceiling, out of which 43843-7-16 Bighas of land had been distributed. Similarly, the government has in several occasions, formed Commissions for squatters with the aim of distributing land to the landless and squatters. However, the decisions have not been effectively implemented. The government does not even have any authentic data on distribution of land to the squatters and peasants till 2020.

The major land reform measure of 1964 and post-1964 developments did not significantly alter the conditions of existence for the peasantry as political parties have not responded to it positively. The abolition of *birta* land, the promulgation of land ceilings, and the redistribution of excess land, amongst other measures, did not facilitate land security for peasants, tenants, and sharecroppers including smallholders. Following the restoration of democracy in 1990, it initially seemed as though there might be significant land reforms and distribution of land to the peasants; but once again, due to the political nexus, such hopes were quickly dashed. A minister proposing such measures was dismissed soon after making his proposal, and this, in effect, epitomizes the post-1990 period. Widespread calls by the political parties for 'land to the tillers' were never pursued vigorously, with neo-liberal restructuring becoming central to the period of democratic rule in Nepal. Because of this, privatisation and commercialisation of landholdings took place, and continue to do so, while peasants are still not able to enhance their rights to the land, including tenants, who remain unregistered and thus insecure.

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<sup>1</sup> 1.5 bigha= 1 hectares



Is there any land ceiling law in Nepal ? I mean do you have any upper limit for agricultural land beyond which no one is allowed to keep ?

Yes, Land Reform Act, 1964, and its subsequent amendments clearly mentioned the land ceiling in Nepal. The Land Reform Acts mentioned the upper limit of agriculture and housing land. The table shows the different land ceiling in different geological areas.

Land Ceilings Set by the 1964 Land Reform Measure

Area	Ceiling for agricultural land	Ceiling for homestead land	Total land ceiling for landlords	Total land ceiling for tenants
<i>Tarai</i> and Inner <i>Tarai</i>	16.4 hectares	2.0 hectares	18.4 hectares	2.7 hectares
Kathmandu Valley	2.7 hectares	0.4 hectares	3.7 hectares	0.5 hectares
Hill region and other regions	4.1 hectares	0.8 hectares	4.1 hectares	1.0 hectares

Source: The 1964 Lands Act, Government of Nepal.

In 2001, the Democratic government reduced the land ceiling of *Tarai* and inner *Tarai* which is 6.7 hectares which is also not implemented.

The Land Reform Acts mentioned the land ceiling and government has the authority to confiscate the surplus land. The landowners were asked to submit the inventory of their owned land within the specified time<sup>2</sup> while implementing the Land Reform Act 1964, but they did not comply with this. In any case, the government had merely ordered landlords to fill in the forms pertaining to excess land without necessarily requiring the documents (which allowed for outright control of the excess land above ceiling).<sup>3</sup> Given the fact that there was no criminal sanction on the failure to furnish a declaration of excess land owned by landlords, this inventory

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<sup>2</sup> Lands Act sec 13.

<sup>3</sup> Madhav Basnet on discussion on tenancy and land ceiling in his home, Kausaltar on 20th July 2013.

provision was generally neglected by landowners, causing delays in the implementation of the ceiling provision. Though the relevant authorities were authorised to confiscate the excess land in question, particularly if landowners failed to submit an inventory, submitted an incomplete inventory, or deliberately submitted a false inventory, in most cases the authorities did not exercise this entrusted power. The local authorities were, in fact, required to ensure that final inventories were compiled. But the legal provisions did not exist to penalise the relevant officers for failure to discharge these assigned responsibilities. Had there been a penal clause in the Lands Act for punishing non-performing officers (responsible in the end for intentional lapses), the process of finalising the inventory of excess land and redistributing land through confiscation would have been expedited.

Who are the landless people and what kind of discrimination they face. I assume, most of them are Dalits and janjati people suffering from caste discrimination too.

Normally people think Dalits and janajatis landless or semi-landless due to occupation but it is also changing from feudalism to capitalism and it is place specific too. In the case of central Tarai, western Tarai and western hill, still it is true. The Tarai's indigenous people, such as the Tharus and Tarai Dalits, have been subjected to pronounced processes of landlessness, followed by Pahadi Dalits and Madeshi people. More specifically, the population of Tarai Tharu Janajatis is high in the western Tarai, and they are amongst the most landless people, losing their land and being turned into agricultural labourers.

The highest number of people from landless households live in Gaun (village) or block land (sometimes also referred as public land) which is made cultivable by them. *Gaun* block land is unregistered land on which a number of households have constructed their houses on small plots. As higher caste landowners needed agricultural labourers or some iron work done, they brought these *Dalits* or indigenous people and put them on this nearby block land, or pushed them off their land and onto this land during the 1964 land reform programme. In the *Tarai* in particular, a large number of landless households are found in these blocks.

Tarai Jajajatis (such as the Tharus) and Tarai Dalits are sharecroppers for landlords in the Tarai. They had in the past deforested some areas of *Tarai* for cultivation purposes, but the extractive land system led to them becoming mere sharecroppers or existing on *Gaun* land mainly as labourers. People from the higher castes and classes often insult and threaten those that live on public land, which the former seek to use for purposes of grazing cattle. As indicated already, the status of sharecroppers, tenants and labourers in Nepal's social structure is a lowly and widely-despised one, certainly from the perspective of the landlords. Most of those on *Gaun* land do not have electricity in their homes, as they do not have land certificates or legal proof of land access.

Who are the land grabbers in Nepal? I mean the social, economic and political power elite of Nepal who own big land? Has government been able to seize land from them.

The main land grabbers are the land plotters, industrialist, and corporate agriculturists including speculators. The banks' loan policies, along with the government's neo-liberal policies, has given birth to *Bhu-mafiya* - literally the 'land-mafia', often used for land brokers who act unscrupulously - who engage in land-plotting for profiteering purposes at the expense of the historically much-trumpeted land reform for genuine peasants.<sup>4</sup> These brokers are the main actors in the land-plotting and sale business and they pocket substantial profits from their land dealings. Now even the land set aside for different industries during the implementation of land reform in the mid-1960s (in an effort to legalise the land above the ceiling set by the government) is being plotted by the new owners.

From the field study, it became clear that a plot of land is generally bought and sold three or more times a year. For the plotting of land, members of this group said that four conditions basically need to be met: (i) political party's backing; (ii) hired hooligans; (iii) the manipulation of government officials; and (iv) the exchange of ill-gotten money.<sup>5</sup> This shows that the

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<sup>4</sup> View of Giriraj Kathayat, Nepali Congress Cadre, Kailali, expressed at an interaction programme on 'Six Decades of Land Reform in Nepal', in Dhangadi, Kailali, organised by Public Policy Pathasala.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Baburam Adhikari on 'Land Plotter', Bardibas, Mahottari on 12th

main actors involved in land plotting and its acceleration are the cadres of political parties, moneyed people, hooligans, and government officials. All these actors are contributing to the plotting of land in all regions and districts of Nepal, generally at the expense of the rural poor.

In recent times, 17,837 hectares of land over a three-year period have been plotted and sold in the Western Region for housing or business purposes. The media report shows that 2015/2016 alone, 298,128 hectares of land in the Western Region's 16 districts have already been plotted, as shown by government records; it also shows the loss of agricultural output arising from this. This region has three *Tarai* districts, two mountain districts, and 11 Hill districts. If this data was extrapolated for all regions of Nepal, 1.5 million hectares of land would have been plotted in any year, deepening the de-peasantisation process of tenants, sharecroppers and smallholders. Due to the implementation of federalism, new urban centres are being developed and agricultural land is being plotted for urban centres and housing in Nepal.

In the hills, it is the Haliyas who are landless and in *Tarai*, it is the Dalits such as Mushahars, Doms and other communities. Is there a difference between the life style and land holdings of Dalits in *Tarai* and Dalits in the Hills. What are the cultural-social differences?

In the case of Nepal, all Dalits are not Haliys or Harawas. It depends on the location. Mostly far western region, some of the Dalits are in Haliya and it has a direct relation with loan. Those who are totally landless and plunged on the loan, they are still Haliya though the Nepali law do not allow. In *Terai*, mostly *Tarai* DalitDalits are landless and most of them were Harawa and Charawa (mostly central *Tarai*). Now some of them are converted into daily wage labourers and some of them still working as Hawara (plougher) and Charawa (cattle header). In hill, there is less exploitation but in *Trai* more exploitation and discrimination. Due to the implementation of federalism, now local governments have brought some specific programmes for them but still the question is land ownership or land access.

CSRC have been part of a national Committee on Land formed by the Nepal government. What is this committee all about and what has been its finding and recommendations. Is the government ready to act on your reports?

The then NCP UML-led Government of Nepal formed a Land Issues Resolving Commission and the appointed the then Executive Director of CSRC as an expert member of Commission in 2020. In 2021, the NCP UML-led government dissolved and coalition government was formed in July 2021. The new government dissolved the previous commission and formed new commission called National Land Commission. Now there is no representation of CSRC in newly formed commission. Both commissions were focused on the landless and squatters. The previous government started lots of initiatives and identifying the landless and squatter people but it was dissolved. The new commission also continued that previous commission work but still did not distribute the land certificates.

How much land is being distributed in terms of meeting the demand of one landless family ? Is there any criteria or law where government has defined how much land will be distributed to the rural landless people?

So far, after the restoration of democracy in 1990, the democratic government formed more than 14 Landless Problem Solving Commissions and some of them distributed to the land to the landless but mostly their cadres and total households and land to around 154856 families received around 46,694 bigha of land. There is critiques that the commission did not distribute the land for real landless and squatter people.

Is the feudal system still prevalent in the villages? Has there been any attempt to put an upper ceiling over the land that an individual can keep ? Is there a law that fix that a person can't have more than such an amount of land ? I think the Maoist government wanted to bring this law to confiscate the land of the powerful people but there was lot of resistance from political parties and other people. What is your understanding about the issue?

In remote area yes ( still feudal systems exist), but now due to the federalism, most of the places, no feudalism but the characteristics of exploitation has been changed. Like from *haliya* or *harawa* to daily wage labour, kind to cash payment. Due to the expensive market, the daily wage is not enough for the family subsistence. Though the Maoist said the confiscation of over ceiling land, now this agenda is passive and they could not do this. The constitution did not allow to confiscate the land without compensation. Since there is no common agreement among political parties, still not developed the plan for the comprehensive land reform and land distribution programme.

How strong is the caste system and untouchability in Nepal ? Do you think that once feudalism is broken, we can really create an equitable society ?

In urban centres there is no discrimination and untouchability but still in some specific place of central tarai and western hills. In some of specific places, it is very much strong and number of cases published on the media. Now the local government is care of all these points and constitution did not allow to do the discrimination and untouchability.

The Dalit movement in Nepal is growing but I am not sure how are its relations with other mainstream organisations like CSRC ? Whether land reform or access to resources are part of their agenda or not ?

In few cases the Dalit movement is strong in Nepal but for the case of land distribution and access to natural resources, still the movement is divided and fragmented. The main problem is still not the collective movement for the land rights of Dalits. Still either it is party directed Dalit movement or NGOs directed Dalits movement. It means, Dalit movement are fragmented and has different position. Each parties and fraction wanted to take credibility and if one group want to do something positive another group blocked it. In this context not only the Dalits other movements are also not collective and united. Still there is no strong voice on the Dalits land rights or access to resources. CSRC has been trying to put the agenda from micro to macro level for their land rights and access to resource. CSRC has been facilitating the land rights movement for last 28 years and including Dalits, indigenous, women's and marginalised peasants land rights and land reform on behalf of them. Since land is

political agenda, and without political willing power and commitment, always challenged.

CSRC has been in the forefront of the issue of Women's Land Rights. What have been your demands in this regard and has the government been positive to it.

As per the position of CSRC and land rights movement, the Constitution of 2015, clearly given land rights to women but still we are waiting its acts and regulations including implementation as per the Constitution. The important part is since Nepal has patriarchy society and strong male dominated socio-economic culture, it is difficult to implement it progressively but if there is strong mobilization it is possible and we are half way of implementation of women's land rights in full swing.

Nepal has a very powerful Community Forestry Programme. Is it still functional? how does it work and what has been the achievements?

Yes, Nepal has model of community forestry programme but still some part of the country has a conflict between community forest users and Dalits or landless because mostly landless people are in so called forest area. The landless people's claim is before community forestry they have been leaving there and later it came community forestry. The landless people wanted to stay in original place and most of them are the members of community forest and still community forest is the model of Nepal. This has established the community rights on forest.

How endangered are the land rights defenders in Nepal ? What are the threats to them and how are you dealing with it.

In few cases yes but it depends on how strong your movement and mobilization. If your mobilization is weak and you are not part of national movement, in this case, there are number of threats. In the case of Nepal, more threats from landlords or hooligans not from directly state. Mostly elites mobilized to state and state structure. Yes, few cases and facing the threatens first from elites and later on state mechanisms.

Are there processes of land grab in Nepal particularly by powerful international corporations ? Are there public protests against them? Can you share with us some of these cases ?

Few cases from International or multi-national companies but mostly national companies and elites. In some of the cases, national projects like dam, road, government structures, industry etc. Like in Nepal many hydro projects are implementing and displacing the people similarly, in the name of commercialization of agriculture or urbanization large numbers of local people are displaced.

In South Asia, a huge track of land has been grabbed by the religious trusts, temples, mosques and other institutions, all in the name of Gods. What is the situation in Nepal ? Is there any discussion or campaign about them so that they too come under the land laws of the country ?

In Nepal, it was given Rana and Shah period called guthi land (religious purpose) but after democracy no except some cases of land for religious temples or houses. As per the government record, still 7% of guthi land and it covers both and Hindu and Buddhist temples.

When was CSRC formed and who were the founders and what was the vision mission.

CSRC was formed in 1993 and some school teachers including me were the founder members. The main mission is work for community empowerment of their natural resource rights and self-reliance.

Community Self-Reliance Centre (CSRC) Nepal is a social movement organization established in 1993. The idea of establishing CSRC was conceived by a group of young and energetic people from Sindhupalchowk, who had essential theoretical knowledge and practical experience in community development and social movement. The idea of beginning local development initiatives was guided by the philosophy of self-reliance development and change of social structure for sustainable development. It values development as a process to be initiated from grass root level rather than a commodity to be transferred from external sources. The group of young people had a commitment to retain youth in village and mobilize them for social change and alleviating poverty through the social movement. CSRC was registered in District Administration Office Sindhupalchowk under Social Organization Registration Act 2034 as well as Social Welfare Council.



How far you think CSRC has succeeded in its efforts to provide justice to the rural poor. Can you share some of your successful initiatives ?

CSRC has been facilitating the land and agrarian rights movement since 1993. The main successes, of the organization are more than 60,000 landless and tenants' households received land certificates and secured their housing and food security. Similarly, the agenda of land reform and rights of peasants still alive and succeeded to put in Constitutions. Many land and agrarian rights activities are elected local level government and few of them in province and federal level. CSRC established National Land Rights Forum which is recognized nationally and internationally. Now the land rights women, Dalits, indigenous people, smallholders, tenants and sharecroppers are established and recognized the land rights movement nationally and internationally. The government of Nepal also recognized the work of CSRC and some of the local governments collaborating with CSRC for the land access to marginalized people and land and agrarian reform plan.



## DR. BURNAD FATHIMA

Society for Rural Education and Development, Chennai, India

*Land Reforms essential for dignity and human rights of Dalits*

Dr. Burnad Fathima Natesan is a Dalit Women activist. She is the Founder of SRED (Society for Rural Education and Development). She has been working among the Dalit, Landless and Tribal Women for the past forty years. Her main motive and involvement is to promote people's movement among the unorganized sectors, empowering rural women to take up political power, uplift them economically through land struggles and see they gain equal status in the society. Working towards a change of society where all are treated equal and for Justice and Peace.

She has promoted a state-level forum, Tamil Nadu Women's Forum, for bringing women's groups and human rights groups together. TNWF has contacts with 350 women and Human Rights groups in Tamil Nadu. She has promoted Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement and working with Dalit women leaders to strengthen the Dalit women leadership. She is Co-coordinating and supporting TNDWM/ TNWF activities by involving herself totally for the cause of the poor, especially Dalit, Irulas to strengthen people's movement for eradicating caste system, for justice and equality. She has promoted platform called 'Women's Coalition for Change', representing women from diverse sectors. She is a trainer a resource person at various seminars, workshops and conducted in and around the country. She has initiated "Occupy Land" encouraging Dalit women to occupy common Land. She has lead many campaigns against corporate, against land grab WTO, RCEP. She has attended conferences and meetings internationally. She is member of APC (Asian Peasant Coalition), APRN (Asia Pacific Research Network), PCFS (Peoples Coalition Food Sovereignty), .At present Steering committee member of Pan AP and Regional council member of APWLD. Fatima has studied in

the US and in the UK and has been a Research Fellow at the IDS, Sussex in the UK. Served as a faculty at Colby College -Maine, USA. She has also been conferred an honorary doctorate by Theological University-Chennai. Received an award from Academic Research Conferences called “Mother Teresa Women Empowerment Awards 2018, 6th of April 2018.”

“Dr. Fatima Burnad, an extraordinary woman who has been fighting for the rights of minorities since she was 11 years old. Her journey till now has not been an easy one, from making her own way in this man’s world, to being kidnapped and threatened for fighting for rights of minorities; she has fought against all odds. Her dedication, determination and will to create an equal world for all are inspiring.

In 1979, she established *Society for Rural Education and Development* (SRED) that works for the rights of people and supports people’s movements. Along with SRED, she is responsible for establishing multiple forums and platforms that promote women’s rights, worker’s rights, and various other people’s movements. She has always voiced a strong resistance against the trade and agricultural policies of the government and has been critical of their impact on the lives of women farmers. Besides being one of the key activists of women and Dalit’s rights in India, Fatima Burnad has a very strong international presence. She brought the issues of Dalit women on international forums” (Feminisminindia.com)

**What is the status of Land Reforms in Tamilnadu State. It has been considered a very progressive state with Dravidian parties swearing in name of legendary Periyar. It is the first state in India where the so called National parties are missing. Can you share with us the process and laws related to land reforms in Tamilnadu.**

**Status of Land Reforms in Tamil Nadu:**

The state of Tamil Nadu is a progressive state. The state since the rule by the Dravidian parties has the tradition of following the ideals of the teachings of Periyar. Two Dravidian parties come to power by using the popularities of the legends like Periyar, Anna, Kalaignar Karunanidhi, MGR and Amma Jayalalitha. The national parties are less prominent in the state dominated by the Dravidian parties. The national party congress is familiar with the people and of late BJP is trying to make inroads in the

state by using the foothold of the ruling AIADMK party. However the nationally ruling party BJP is not very familiar in the state like the communist parties CPI and CPM.

The process and laws related to land reforms in Tamil Nadu:

The state has the long tradition of peasant protests against the exploitation of rich land owners. They continued to struggle for survival as they were denied adequate wages, drought resulted unemployment, dependency on seasonal work and other labour related issues and caste subjugation, since the landless are Dalits and the land holders belong to the other caste community. The communist party CPM was always behind the motivation of the landless to voice against the rich land owners and for claiming the rights of workers. Because of these the governments at the state level and at the union came up with the enactment of agrarian laws.

The Congress party and the communist party (CPM) brought out proposals in the election manifestos to lure the votes of peasants. When the congress government came to power in the year 1946, the 1<sup>st</sup> step towards Land Reform was the elimination of the zamindari system and passed Madras Estate Land Reduction Bill of 1947. It became an Act in 1949, and thereby eliminated the zamindari system by paying compensation and the government took over all lands from the zamindaris.

Wiping away fundamentalism: (How far it has been wiped out is still a question)

When I started working in the 70s, I met zamindars in Chitamoore in Chingalpet district, who had moved to village. The two brothers were still holding several acres of waste lands and Cattle sheds. They had donated a land for a hospital at Rawathakuppam and continued to control to have hold of the operations of the hospital. They were awfully rich, going around in huge cars, living in big bungalows and led a very modern life.

The Madras Cultivating Tenants protection Act was enacted in the year 1955 towards protecting the tenants from the rich land owners and later was amended, followed by the enactment of the Madras Cultivating Tenants Act.

The Member of Legislative Council Saraswathy Pandurengan, Ms. Ponnammal and Dr. Soundaram pressurized the government to pass

“Land Ceiling Act” to control holding of huge land by landlord, and to get excessive lands to be distributed to the landless. The congress government under the leadership of the then Chief Minister Mr. K. Kamaraj introduced the Land Ceiling Act. Though the Zamindari was eliminated in 1948 still many continued to own huge volume of private lands.

During my field work at Chengalpet district, it was always referred to the landlords with the reference to Moopanar the congress leader, who owned 5000 acres even after the land ceiling. The zamindars in the working area, after the Land Reform Act distributed their lands to Dalits who were the panniyal as Benamis and also some divorced their wives and divided the land. It was a joke those days that even the pets like dogs also had land title. Land Reform Act or L.C.A what is the meaning of it even now in Tamil Nadu many legends including late J Jayalalitha had bought Kodai Nadu and her friend Sasikala has bought half of Tamil Nadu. The rich are continue to be landlords and the landless are struggling to survive.

The ceiling of land to a family was limited to 30 standard acres. Later the Tamil Nadu Land Reform Amendment Act 1970, the ceiling was reduced to 15 standard acres. The landless were given land in 1975. The land ceiling act considered to the socialist pattern of society get stuck where the implementation is at stand still. The congress government enacted many land reforms act but the struggle for livelihood, existence is a continuous one as no land reform act could be implemented in letter and spirit, and the rich always continue to find loopholes to evade divesting of their lands.

Zamindars owned villages not just acres of lands but the politicians replaced the zamindars of holding 1000s of acres of land and above all the governments allowed the multinational corporate to grab lands under many trade agreements.

The Dravidian legends Periyar role in land reform is very minimal and his concern is not class struggle but more of a social reformist fighting against untouchability, and voicing for women’s rights and against superstitions.

Dravidian non Brahmin movement led the Tamailnadu politics. It is also said that that the government worked towards the emancipation of the caste discrimination yet reports of violence against Dalits are rampant from Tamilnadu. Have the Dravidian reforms stopped with the empowerment of the OBCs or are they taking it further to the Dalits too.

Have there been sincere efforts to land reforms that could benefit the Dalits.

Dravidian non Brahmin movement, a strong social reformists led Tamil Nadu politics which is caste biased.

Who are the Dravidian non Brahmin leaders?

What is the role of DalitDalits in this movement?

It is the politics based on caste dominated groups and how the Dalits are used for political upliftment of other OBCs and higher caste.

It is not only the Brahmins in Tamil Nadu but other castes are also dominant and use Dalits to put up posters and Banners. The Dalits who are unemployed are used for shouting slogans, participating in large numbers in rallies for little return. They are made to play these roles out of compulsion and survival.

The Dalits- SC/STs are not in the high-level committees of these Dravidian non Brahminical movements or in their political parties. Their roles in politics is very minimal. Who controls, divides the role of SC/STs?

There are few reserved seats for Dalits in political spaces. But how many Dalit MPs, MLAs are working to eradicate untouchability and annihilate caste? None as they are also loyal to their own parties, floor crossing, co-opted for higher ministerial posts. They do not believe changes will come through governments which are working towards maintaining the caste and not to eradicate caste discrimination.

Dalits are discriminated through the government's policies on housing, ration shops, hospital all public services which government is establishing in these public places. Discrimination in segregating the separate, cherais, colonies, slum for SC/STs are crowded, no proper drainage, no light, toilets. Dalits who are humans live in inhuman conditions and no one knows how long this will continue?

The governments have failed miserably in re-distributing surplus lands to SC/STs as per the Ceiling Act and have failed to implement the Land Reforms Act because of the lack of political will and due to the dominance of the other caste. The Land Reforms Acts have increased land holding of non SC/ST households. Land given to SC/STs under this act was also forcibly taken by other caste.

There is a saying in my village that the elders sold away lands to other caste for a measure of raggi, for bed sheets for drinks. I do not believe these rumours. They were forced to sell away and it was during famine there occurred the need for food to survive and the Dalits were cheated to sell away the lands to the other caste.

It is the Economic exploitation when Dalits resist, they have to face the wrath of violence and abuse from others. The large number of caste riots in Tamil Nadu, why? It's all based on crippling the economic base, related to burning homes, destroying the properties whatever Dalits have saved. In one incident at Rajapalayam the other caste entered the Dalit village in large numbers poured kerosene in rice, broke the T.V. , damaged the floor made of tiles, damaged tube lights, burnt books and certificates why all these?

The economic upcoming of Dalits, rising up is not tolerable for others. Dalits cannot be landed but have to remain as coolies, scavengers never a master to be? Always to be slaves a modern slave in this modern world? Keep them in their place? It's an economic order to keep Dalits from owning land or receiving good education.

The Land Reform to Dalits was initiated by the sincere Christian missionaries' efforts to ensure land rights to Dalits during 19<sup>th</sup> century particularly by J.H.A Tremen Heer.

Allocation of "Panchami lands" in post-Colonial Tamil Nadu with conditions to prevent other caste taking over these lands from Dalits, was another initiative. The condition has not changed. Where are those lands now? They are now in the possession of other caste.

Why in your opinion land reforms essential today. Are they relevant in today's time? How much land should be given to the landless people to a sustainable and dignified livelihood ?

Land reforms are very essential today. It is the socialist pattern of society towards which unequal economic order to be removed to attain equal society. It's the class, caste, patriarchy to be addressed. Land reforms are to redistribute land to the landless. Land is life, resource for food security. Land is basis for people's food sovereignty. Caste needs to be annihilated which has been a tool perpetuating the exploitative economic system.



Dr. B. R. Ambedkar promoted the idea of collective farms of nationalizing land, land to all. Food is produced by the landless Dalits in the land of the other caste. Dalits need to own their land collectively and produce food together for their communities collectively.

Land holding is dignity, recognition and it is empowering socio, political Economic cultural and in all aspects. The status of Dalits in the society should be increased and respected by all. Dalits should be the real owners not coolies to control their lives and no more slaves. To achieve this land reform is very crucial and the real need of land reforms is very essential today.

You have been raising the issue of the Dalit women with in the Dalit movement too. Why are Dalit women's issues different than Dalit men when a majority of them are landless.

Dalit women are landless, have no resources, work very hard for a very low wages. Dalit women are toiling masses, Dalits among Dalits. There are 9.79 crore Dalit women in India as per the 2011 National census. Dalit women live in a caste embedded patriarchal society. They are the most oppressed and exploited, treated as untouchables but when the question of sexual exploitation, they become touchable. They are at the lower strata of the society, dehumanized and face multiple discriminations.

“Progress of any society should be measured in terms of the degree of progress which women have achieved” by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Unless and until the status of Dalit women improves the society will not progress. Dalits movement, peasant, Human Rights Women’s movement, people movements, what is the role of Dalit women and how the Dalit women questions raised, and what kind of role the Dalit women are playing in these movements are major questions should be asked. Political parties use Dalit women only to gain name and fame, for political gain. How many well educated Dalit women are there? How many Dalit women are in leadership, accepted and recognized? Where are they in politics? They are meagre and invisible, unable to raise their voices. Where is the platform for Dalit women to question, practice and to exercise their rights?

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar said only through empowerment of women, can the annihilation of caste is possible. He encouraged political participation of Dalit women and wanted them to join social movements. He encouraged

Dalit women to be educated, mobilized and to participate in public life against caste hierarchy.

Similar to the Patriarchal Hindu hierarchical society, the Dalit movements will not accept equal position of Dalit Women due to caste hierarchy, the other movements, including women's movement are not prioritizing caste, gender and the intersectionality.

In the 1980s the caste identity started, and two path of feminism identified, Savarna and Asavarna mainly focusing on education, organization and Agitation for Dalit Women young Dalit feminist formed Mahila Saujad and in mid 1995 Beijing women's conference identified that the marginalized women issues to be addressed and to be empowered.

In 1997 in Tamil Nadu there was a very big caste riot in Rajapalayam in Virudunagar district. The Tamil Nadu Women's Forum (TNWF) and other twelve women's movement visited Rasapalayam, the riot area and held a press meet, reported to human rights commissions, petitioned to the government about how Dalit women faced violence, sexually harassed, killed, lost their belongings during the caste riots by other caste..

Out of these riots emerged Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement (TNDWM) and mobilized Dalit women to say no more Violence against Dalit women and to raise their voices collectively as a movement. Dalit women issues are issues of the society. The whole society is responsible in keeping the low status of Dalit Women and it is not only the Dalit women movement to address the issue.

Dalit women should be equally mobilized to get political and economic rights and have an equal status in the society. Dalit women are mobilized internationalized the Dalit women issues and found alliance with other movements of discriminated, marginalized. Dalit women movement is not to function in isolation. The movement joins women's movement Nationally, Regionally and Internationally. As women, Dalit women to bring changes in the society and annihilate caste need to join movements globally to address the issues of patriarchy, Globalization, Militarism and Fundamentalism.

You have been advocating the issue of land for the Dalit women but many people say that it will only 'break' the family as Dalit men too dont

have land in their names. Dalit men are not like Savarna men who might have big land in their name

The issue of land to Dalits is livelihood but for others it is property, an asset. When in 1970 women's movement started, the same questions were asked. Workers movements are split when women are mobilized are the question raised. The women's issues got unattended by workers movements, same way whenever, wherever wage increase and equal wage issues are raised, men workers showed no cooperation saying, women will not respect men and feel equal up to men's shoulders. Never realize that the income of the family gets increased.

Economic and political rights are advocated throughout TNDWM in Tamil Nadu. Through TNDWM Dalit women need to have property rights and how the "break" of families is taking place? There are many other reasons for breaking the families not by the land rights to Dalit women. Dalit women are food producers, and land is a source of life. Dalit women are agricultural labourers constitute 71%. In all the struggles in the history led by women, when it succeeded, the women were left behind when land was distributed only among men. The status of Dalit women to be equalized with other women only when Dalit women poses piece of land. Dalit women are economically vulnerable and dependant on landed and work as bonded labourers. Dalit women are abused, sexually harassed while working for the feudal land lords.

TNDWM mobilized Dalit women collective farms in 5 districts in Tamil Nadu and one in Andhrapradesh. The land is acquired, reclaimed by Dalit women who are illegally occupied by the other castes. Landless Dalit women apply for land to the revenue department by going though the village maps, petitioning with survey numbers with the support of the revenue department Dalit women reclaim land, plough, and cultivate millets. Dalit women own the land collectively, share the harvest among them. Dalit women support the land reclaiming because it's not individually owned.

Dalit women have faced many hurdles at the hands of landlords, continuously but being in the movement, more women join, and protest peacefully, expose the landlord. Dalit women are militant, sharing and caring for each other.

Governments these days argue that they don't have enough land for redistribution. The anti poverty programme initiated by it look like 'charities' and 'entitlement' based like subsidised ration, mid day meal for students and MNREGA. Can these 'charities' be really called an alternative to the land and resource rights of the people.

Governments are creating "land bank" to bring all the lands given under Bhoodan land rights, waste and private lands to be given to multinational corporations. 1000s of acres of land, even good agriculture lands are forcefully taken away by government to be given to Adani and Ambani for mega projects. The unnecessary 8 lane roads from Salem to Chennai, power plants, Sagarmala, Methane, laying gas pipe lines, violating fishing communities rights over sea shore of building port... for whose developments? All for the multi-nationals to loot the resources by taking away lives of the poor Dalits, farmers and workers.

When we go through the village maps, can identify who has grabbed common lands illegally occupying wastelands, what happened to the Panchami lands given to Dalits and in whose possession are they now? Are they in the hands of Dalits or in the hands of others? Redistribution of land is need of the hour. Land is available in the hands of religious institutions, Hindu mutts and all politicians have grabbed the lands.

There is no political will to investigate in whose hands the lands are today. Investigate, redistribute, and strictly implement the Land Reform Act.

The anti –poverty program, charities, entitlement, subsidized ration, mid day meal MGNREGA can never be an alternative to the land and resources and food rights of the people and making citizens more dependent and beggars. Poverty should address the root causes of redistribution of wealth not charities which creates unequal positions. Citizens should be treated equal, why rotten, uneatable rice with worms to the poor when all the "Haves" have varieties of good rice like Basumathi. People are all the same treating all equally and need proper employment skill training, land distribution full payment to all. Why should there be the discrimination like the organized and unorganized workers. All the workers need to be formalized and given jobs with legal protection. All should have the provision of pension, EPF, monthly salary, all legal benefits to all workers, and then no need for midday meal to children,

every family with good income by both husband and wife will take care of the meal for the children.

MGNREGA is not well organized but the state should spend money on Agriculture-related appropriate employment by creating small scale food produce centers to ensure benefit for rural workers.

Tamilnadu was the victim of massive Tsunami in the year 2005. Few years back, the state saw heavy rains. It is a state with a huge population of fisher folks who depend on the fishing but more and more coastal areas are now becoming out of bound of them under various pretext of 'preserving' ecology and environment. How do you react to this ?

Tamil Nadu is continuously facing floods, cyclone, due to global warming as it is happening in other places. Tsunami 2004 was the worst that affected 13 coastal districts and killed 1567 people. Tsunami destroyed everything within 20 minutes and caused a very big national calamity. It affected 591 fishing villages having small fishing crafts and traditional boats. As per the fisher folks census, the number of people in 2000 was 698268.

There is a depletion of fishery resources due to increased pollution of coastal waters. Globalization process, and export oriented new economic policies, trade agreements has very bad impacts on fisher folks, ecological imbalances due to tourism huge industrialization, mega projects, infrastructures are real threat to fisher folks. This is in addition to the numerous chemical, pharmaceutical, industrial complexes, aquaculture shrimp farms, resorts, farmhouses, hotels, entertainment parks to add with.

Kalpakkam atomic plant is always a threat and the East Coast Road built causing accidents of fisherfolk is an everyday danger faced. Power plants, mega plants also degrade and destroy the coastal ecology and the communities.

The mangroves at Pitchavaram and Mutheyalpet which saved villages nearby from Tsunami are also being degraded. 1991 Coastal Zone Regulation (CRZ) notification by the ministry of environment and forests, prohibits certain activities within 500 meters of the High Tide Line (HTL). 1991 notification has been diluted twice through amendments and court judgments. The 1999 amendment that addresses fisher folks as 'local inhabitants', is a death knell to coastal communities and to coastal ecology.

Environmental impact assessment treated seriously Aqua Farms that continue to degrade agricultural fields and cause reduction of fish yield. May aquafarms continue to function violating 'coastal regulation zone' laws and the Supreme Court judgments. No actions could be taken as the plea of the fisherfolk goes in vain. They continue to struggle and uphold their rights.

Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI) study discloses that Chennai is second only to Mumbai in having the most degraded coastal ecosystem. The main threats to coastal ecology and to the coastal communities of Pulicat lake and the Kattupalli island coming in the form of 'Ennore satelittle Port', in the north Chennai Thermal power station (NCTPS) Petro Chemical Park (propped). The effluent from these plants has adversely effected the growth of fish, prawns and decline in fish catch. Coastal polities should be seriously taken into consideration – coastal communities rights and livelihoods should be respected and recognized.

**What has been the impact of land acquisition and mining on Dalit Adivasi communities in Tamilnadu?**

Dalit and Tribals are excluded from land holding. They are exploited, marginalized and subjugated. It is the structural inequality of the land holding which is controlled and is in the hands of few. The Adivasis are designated as Scheduled Tribes STs, who constitute 8.01% of total Indian population. The Hindu fundamentalists, are saying they are Hindus and call them Vanavasi with collective consciousness the elders of the community manage the cultural political and social aspects of the community. They have relationship with nature which is the basis of knowledge and spiritualities.

Adivasis believe that land is the gift of God. For them, land belongs not only to the living but also to the dead-to their ancestors. Therefore, they not only have physical but emotional and spiritual attachment to land as well. Land is the basic economic power hub for the life of the Adivasis. Being agrarian communities, land provides one important part of their identity too.

Out of 300 million indigenous people of the world 67.76% million live in India. They are in 26 states and Union Territories in India as per the 2011 census 104 million almost 9% of India's population. For Adivasis, land is

not a commodity. Land is the basis for their livelihood, economic survival, spiritual well being and cultural identity. They believe that the land and forest belongs to them and have right to do what they want land is a survival resource. Adivasis are very poor, low levels of literacy vulnerable, exploited by the powerful. They live in mountains, hills and forests.

Most of them living in rural areas depend on agricultural works, as they are landless agricultural workers. The Adivasis who have been cultivating and claiming forests within their customary practices are made to work as labourers in their own lands. Adivasis resistance increased due to land alienation and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Adivasi movement started. The government projects displaced Adivasis from their lands.

2006 Forest Rights gave Adivasis rights to live on the forest lands they have been cultivating. When mineral companies were allowed to enter these areas, the Adivasis were called as encroachers and faced eviction. Fertile lands are being taken away from Adivasis and are given to huge industrial groups. In the event of the construction of the Narmada dam affecting the Adivasis (tribal) 200000 tribal were evicted and displaced.

**Have there been any people's movement resisting against this? Who are they and what has been their impact?**

The Indian Constitution specifically provided certain Articles in the Constitution for the upliftment of tribals and also to protect them from the oppression caused by the other people in the society. The protective rights granted by the Indian Constitution, 1950 to the tribal people can be classified under the following:

1. Educational and Cultural Rights (Articles 15(4), 29, 46 and 350)
2. Social Rights (Articles 23 and 24)
3. Economic Rights (Articles 244 and 275)
4. Political Rights (Articles 164(1), 243, 330, 334 and 371.)
5. Employment Rights (Articles 15(4), 16(4) and 16(4A))

In addition to these rights, Fifth and Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution completely deals with the tribal people. Human rights are meant to be protected from the misuse of governmental power. There are certain

spheres of human life that must not be encroached by governmental authority, some of which are life, liberty, property, religious belief, etc. Insisting these there have been initiatives in India voicing for the rights of Adivasis. However, they have remained sporadic and local specific with the exception of the uproar in the case of the Narmada Bachao Andholan against the dam proposal and Singur against the Tata car plant demonstrates.

For instance in the cases of Maharashtra, where it had plans to build an upper and middle class “New Mumbai” on top of rice fields which would displace 45 villages and 250,000 people, and the focus was the anti-displacement movement in Maharashtra.

The case of Chhattisgarh, where multinational companies forced displacement of 300,000 tribal villagers in southern Chhattisgarh by the Salwa Judum (“Purification Hunt”) is another incident.

In the state of Jharkhand, the People’s Movement against Displacement and for Development opposed in the Karna Pura Valley the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), a branch of the Ministry of Energy, set its sights on developing huge open-pit coal mines that would eventually displace 186 villages and 250,000 out of the 300,000 people lived in the valley.

In Orissa another resource-rich state with a large tribal population where Tata Steel and the South Korean steel company Posco tried to grab land to build large steel plants. In June 2005, the Orissa government and Posco signed a Memorandum of Understanding for Posco to build a 12 million ton steel plant at Jagatsinghpur which would eventually displace seven villages and 22,000 people from 4,000 acres of land and would cause thousands of fisherman and villagers in the port area lose their livelihood. The Posco Resistance Struggle Committee organized farmers to resist, resulting in emergence of the Anti-Displacement Movement (ADC).

There is widespread in the Indian people’s resistance to displacement and it has grown over the past few years. However, the Indian government and the state governments are having vested interest in promoting the rights of the multinationals and are anti-people. They are moving to derail the protests of the people’s resistance with lies about it being opposed to all



forms of development and to destroy it by the use of armed force. International solidarity with India's anti-displacement movement is essential.

**You have been part of an international pesticide network. What does it do and how is it relevant in context of India in general and in Tamilnadu in particular.**

Since the year 1985, I have been involved in 'Decade Of Women' and I've attended many women's conferences internationally. From 1987 till today, I have been playing an important role with APWLD as a Regional Council Member and State level movements with TNWF, TNDWM which are networks of APWLD. SRED, TNWF and TNDWM are playing as organizing committee members in 3 programs of APWLD that is WITCH or *Women Interrogating Corporate Hegemony*, WIP or *Women in Power* and FDJ or *Feminist Development Justice*.

I'm also participating as a member of *Asian Peasant Coalition* (APC), *Asian people's Research Network* (APRN), *People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty* (PCFS), *International Movement Against Racism and Discrimination* (IMADR); all these are supporting peoples movements, campaigns against globalization, World Trade Organisation, IMF, World Bank, RCEP at the local, regional and international level.

PAN Asia Pacific (PANAP) is one of five regional centres of Pesticide Action Network, a global network dedicated to the elimination of harm upon humans and the environment by pesticide use. Alongside this, it also focuses on promoting sustainable biodiversity-based ecological agriculture (BEA).

PANAP's vision is a society that is truly democratic and culturally diverse, based on social and gender justice, fair distribution of productive resources and environmental safety and sustainability. PANAP pursues this vision by:

- Strengthening people's movements in their assertion of rights to land and livelihood;
- Advancing food sovereignty;
- Promoting BEA and defending the diverse Asian rice heritage;

- Resisting corporate agriculture and control over seeds;
- Protecting people and the environment from highly hazardous pesticides;
- Opposing neo-liberal globalisation that harms people's interests; and
- Empowering rural communities, especially rural women, and building up women's leadership in all such movements.

Community empowerment is at the core of social change. As such, PAN AP has developed strong partnerships with peasants, agricultural workers, indigenous peoples, fisher folk and other small food producers, and rural women's movements throughout the Asia Pacific region.

Guided by and working closely with these grassroots groups, PAN AP has over time built its reputation and credibility as a regional advocacy network.

As a network, PAN AP is currently comprised of 108 partner organizations from the Asia Pacific region and has links with about 400 other regional and global civil society and grassroots organizations.

Major programmes and campaigns in recent years include:

- Food Sovereignty and Ecological Agriculture Program
- Women in Agriculture Program
- Pesticides Program
- Save Our Rice Campaign
- Information and Communications Program

How important is the issue of Food Sovereignty for indigenous communities in India and why are people's organisations are speaking of it and not really of the Food Security concerns.

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.

Food sovereignty allows communities control over the way food is produced, traded and consumed. It could create a food system that is designed to help people and the environment rather than make profits for

multinational corporations. The food sovereignty movement is a global alliance of farmers, growers, consumers and activists.

Small-scale food producers feed 70% of the world's population, producing food for local markets and communities using ecological techniques. But this is under threat by the growing dominance of corporations in the global food system. Global agribusiness is grabbing more land, pushing privatized seeds and promoting mass usage of expensive farming chemicals. As big business profits, small-farmers struggle to keep control of land, seeds and their way of life.

Across the world, small-scale food producers are resisting corporate control and instead promoting food sovereignty. This framework was developed by farmers in the global south and enables communities to control the way food is produced, traded and consumed for the benefit of people and the environment rather than corporate profits.

Small-scale food producers are experiencing escalating levels of violence and oppression. Their way of life stands in the way of global agribusiness expansion and they are losing their land and their livelihoods.

Negotiations are taking place at the UN on a declaration of rights for small-scale food producers. If successful, this would be an important step to enshrine their rights and help protect small-farmers across the world from violence and persecution.

Since 2014, Global Justice Now has been campaigning to challenge the role of the UK government in pushing corporate-controlled agriculture through the aid scheme, New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition.

**Can you share with us what is Tamilnadu Women's Forum and when did it start. How many member organisations does it have and what are its objectives and goals. What have been the major achievements.**

The Tamil Nadu Women's Forum (TNWF) was started in the year 1991 in order

1. to train and equip women for leadership,
2. to strengthen women's movement,
3. to build up strong people's movement

TNWF is a state-level initiative for promotion of women's rights and gender justice. It is active in 30 districts, and there are 450 groups as well individuals from all over Tamil Nadu that are active members of the forum. TNWF has both women and men active members

TNWF has built up the political demands for legal remedies, women leadership and linkages to local and national movements. Also, TNWF is the first state level women's initiative to raise voice against communalism, fundamentalism and globalization. TNWF has taken up the Dalit women victims of caste clashes and it was exposed to both the general public and to the ruling class.

TNWF envisages achieving;

- Gender equality Gender equality
- Justice for all
- Casteless and classless society
- Socio-economic, political and cultural empowerment of women
- Land rights for women
- Political participation of women at all levels of democratic forums
- Promoting and strengthening the women's movements
- Creating access to justice for the survivors of gender inequality and survivors of Human Rights violations
- Promoting food security
- Combating globalization, communalism and terrorism

How important are the issues of Dalit and Adivasi women with in the broader women category and what have been your experiences in dealing with these issues when negotiate with 'mainstream' women's movements.

There are sub-castes within the caste system. The hierarchy, discrimination continues with sub castes such as *the Pallar, Parayars, Adi Thamilar* that practice untouchability among themselves, no mingling, no inter marriages, landlessness and jobs are different. No equality. Our programs with TNDWN brought all communities together. It motivated women from different sub-castes to fight against the caste, class, patriarchy and culture.

Dalit women and Irular women and all other marginalized communities need to be brought together to show how they can be economically empowered. Land distribution, land reform and collective farming will throw away the strict boundaries of caste/class/patriarchy and all the other religious-cultural oppression. The minority women should be motivated to enter into political participation by joining local governance expose women to various foras which is a learning process and make them good leaders of the community.

**When was SRED formed and who are the founders and what was the aim. What has been its target areas and successes?**

Society for Rural Education and Development shortly known as SRED is a registered not for profit organization, founded in the year 1979, by Ms. Burnad Fathima, a women visionary leader. The General Body, Executive committee and the Collective are comprised of all women. Main focus of SRED is on women to raise their voice towards achieving their rights, to promote equal role at all levels and every space. SRED works towards promoting equal share in household economy, equal participation and promoting women's role as important and integral part within the society towards regaining respect and dignity as women within the community, and not to be looked upon as mere child bearing machine, instead they are equally powerful and integral part of families and society, in building community and nation. SRED works towards making men to understand the importance and power of women and the need for involving women and men equally in building up the community towards a just and peaceful society. Towards this SRED has prompted various movements at state and local levels. At state level they are federated.

**How did you get influenced to social movements and when ?**

Yes, it's a wonderful feeling to think about how I was moved to rescue an 11-year domestic worker who was of my age at that time. I continue to live in a Dalit village. I studied at an elementary school in Perumuchi village, Arakonam which is my native village, and I am still staying there at my parent's house.

Four people have played an important role in my childhood. They have been my constant motivation and their values have shaped my entire life.

My teacher in class 1 was Mr. Agan, who later became my brother-in-law after he married my sister and my teacher in third class, my own father, Mr. M. P. Natesan. I still carry his name as a suffix. I am proud of him and I follow his teachings. I learned about patriarchal norms in my childhood itself from his behaviour towards us sometimes. After which, my 5<sup>th</sup> class teacher, Mrs. Premavathy, a very religious person came as my inspiration.

I used to walk 5 to 6 km every day to go to a higher secondary school in Arakonam. Here, I had the opportunity of volunteering for various activities and I was appreciated and motivated by my teachers. After standard 8th, I moved to Chennai to Northwick girls' higher secondary school where the principal was my inspiration in every way. I admired the way she dressed in cotton sarees, the way she walked and talked, and her style of communicative English motivated and encouraged me to speak in English. All of the people I have mentioned played an important role in my life and have been my motivation from childhood to school days.

In the hostel, I was called "Lady with the Lamp" for taking care of the students who were kept in the sick room while no one dared to go near that room. It was very dark and at the far end of the dormitory. At college too, I had very good friends, teachers, from all departments I was helping and supporting.

**You have been part of many initiative related to Dalit and women's rights in India as well as globally. How serious have been these campaigns and their reach to the people.**

The campaigns related Dalit women and women's rights at various levels could create impact at various levels including grassroot. The grassroot realities could be taken before the national, regional and international spaces, and the initiatives could be mainstreamed. The issues of Dalit women could be represented before the delegates and dignitaries of CERD conference in Durban.

With the support of International organizations, the issues of Dalits and women could be placed before the international spaces and at the national level initiatives could be placed before the concerned spaces. These initiatives could create impacts at the local level and the ultimate beneficiaries were Dalit women. The campaign against genetic engineering

technology, genetically modified organisms and voice for promotion of organic farming practices could create grassroot impact.

The international experiences of Beijing Platform, food sovereignty issues, global issues impacting local resources being taken away from people and similar issues have mobilized the local communities to join voices and challenge land grabbing and displacement. The campaigns are initiated based on the issues at local levels and taken at national, regional and international levels.

The number of NGOs in India is growing but most of them work on purely 'developmental' issues and charities which wait for some events. The Rights based initiatives and organizations are discouraged. What has been your experience in this regard?

India's democratic space is shrinking and democratic freedoms, including freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association are constrained in India. Muzzling the voices of human right activists, violent attacks on journalists and civil society groups, and the clampdown in Jammu & Kashmir post the abrogation of article 370, are the norms of the day. The present ruling party in India seems to be turning its back on civic freedoms by going after its critics including activists and journalists. Assault on expression is done in the country with an array of restrictive laws. The Indian government uses restrictive laws like the National Security Act and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act to harass, detain, and criminalize anyone raising voice against the government. This has been in the case of many as was in the case of the Dalit activist and Management Professor, Anand Teltumbde's investigation for his alleged connection with the Bhima Koregaon violence case. Students are also targeted and slapped with sedition charges for allegedly shouting 'anti-India' slogans. The government has been using "draconian" Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA) to cut foreign funding and probe non-governmental organisations which are critical of the government. Instead of ensuring justice, the government increases repression with detentions and restrictions on the access to information.

Under such backdrop it is essential to come out with different alternatives to reach out to the people and make them aware of their rights. This is one aspect why the NGOs in India continue with the developmental issues.

However SRED promoted movements have not deterred away and continue to voice for the right based issues as always.

How important is for the international organisations to acknowledge the issue of caste discrimination and untouchability in their global agenda.

I am convinced that international organizations acknowledge and extend solidarity with India's issue of caste discrimination and untouchability is essential. The world needs to know about this inhuman form of caste discrimination and untouchability and include addressing the issue in their global agenda. It needs to become as a powerful movement, to exert pressure on the Indian government to address and uphold the issues of Dalits and tribal people. This requires efforts like the International Campaigns. Independent larger and more prominent Fact-Finding Mission to India should bring out the issue to limelight.

In your long years working in the social movements, which one or two incidents made you satisfied with our work in terms of successful initiatives.

In the long years of working with social movements SRED has promoted movements at the local level and state level. With the support of the movements SRED could address and access justice for victimized Dalit women and redress for tribal communities. There are several incidents that have given satisfaction in challenging infringement of rights and upholding justice for the victimized. We are proud of every successful venture. However, the successful venture against massive land grabbing under development project of Special Economic Zones and construction of Dam are two incidents that the organization is very proud of.

Any particular success story related to Land Rights movement or access to resources by Tamilnadu Women's organisation.

Notable achievement is mobilization of Dalit agriculture women workers and equipping them with a capacity to approach officials and to claim lands in their names, which is not a normal practice. This process helped Dalit agricultural worker women of Kaverirajapuram in Thiruvallur district to access 196 acres of land and they are cultivating this land collectively. Women agricultural workers of Pallur in Vellore district reclaimed 7 acres



of land and they are using the same for collective farming.. 830 Dalit agricultural women of 19 villages of Chittoor Jilla of Andhra Pradesh claimed 1350 acres of land. They are cultivating these lands by adapting natural farming practices. Another major achievement is promotion of women leadership in democratic spaces. Organization equipped Dalit and indigenous women to contest in election for democratic forums of Local Self Governance. Among them 48 women got elected as Panchayat Presidents and 222 women got elected as ward members



# GLADSON DUNGUNG

Author & Activist

*Writers and historians have done grave injustice to Adivasis*

Adivasi author and activist Gladson Dungdung writes prolifically on Adivasis' struggles for their identity and on their existence.

Your new book *Endless Cry in the Red Corridor* has hit the stands recently. What is the central message of this book?

We want to tell the world that the rulers of this country have looted the people. There is this area of around 9,000 square kilometres, extending from Andhra Pradesh to Nepal. They call it the Red Corridor. They say there are Naxals in this corridor, there are Maoists. But just pick up the map of India and you will find that there are Tribals in this area. There are forests, there are minerals, in this corridor and they call it the Red Corridor! Why do they call it the Red Corridor? Because they want to exploit the natural resources of this area, they want to loot and sell the minerals and the water and the forests. In 2008, the Government of India commissioned the British company, Execution Noble & Company Ltd, to study the economic potential of the Red Corridor. It concluded that it has immense business opportunities. If it is exploited, the Indian economy can take a quantum jump, the company's report said. [Then home secretary] G.K. Pillai promised that the Red Corridor would be vacated by 2013. This was duly given in writing. And to fulfil the promise, two lakh paramilitary troops were sent to this area. Look, how they killed the Tribals after branding them as Naxals. In at least three states, I have seen how Tribals were branded as Naxals and brutally done to death and I have written about it in the book. Later, it came to the fore that they were innocent. They have killed at least 1,000 innocent Tribals in this manner. More than 500 tribal women were sexually exploited. They were subjected to all kinds

of atrocities. In Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, they threw over 27,000 persons behind bars.

In the Saranda forests, about which I have written a book, *Mission Saranda* ... the government says it cannot run schools in that area, it cannot establish Aanganwadis, it cannot build roads. But I have shown that companies are extracting minerals in that area. If the state cannot do anything there, how are the companies operating? They are paying money to Maoists – some are paying Rs 50 lakhs, some are paying Rs 25 lakhs. They also provide arms to them. But, if a Tribal even serves food to a Maoist holding them at gunpoint, you put him in jail.

It is clear that the government wants to snatch their forests, water, land and other resources from the Tribals. An English proverb goes, “Give a dog a bad name and hang him.” The government is doing exactly that vis-à-vis the Tribals. Brand them as Naxals and kill them. And no one protests.

What is sad is that those who are talking about development for the Tribals know next to nothing about them.

There is no disputing the fact that development is needed. But how can they decide what is development? How can they decide how to bring it about? I’m sure you remember Chidambaram telling Parliament that Tribals belong to the museums. How can he talk about the development for Tribals without knowing anything about them?

For argument’s sake, let us accept this definition of development. Now tell me, mining began in the Saranda forests in 1925. Every year, the government extracts iron ore worth Rs 5,000 crores from there. But there is no good road for the Tribals there, no good school, no good hospital. Why? Why 70 per cent women of the area are anaemic? Why 80 per cent tribal children are malnourished?

Jharkhand is a Tribal-dominated state but even here Tribals have been marginalized.

See, whether it is the BJP or the Congress, their agenda has been the same – annihilate the Tribals. Since the time of Independence, the slogan was that the Tribals and the Dalits have to be brought into the mainstream. And what is the mainstream? Leave behind all that is yours and come and join us. They want our identity to be destroyed. So, our battle is for our

identity. The Supreme Court had said on 5 June 2011 that Tribals are the indigenous inhabitants of this country. They fear this fact and that is why they want to finish everything.

Besides the rest of the world, the Supreme Court has also admitted that the Adivasis are the original inhabitants of this country. What is stopping the government from accepting this fact?

There was a long debate on this issue in the Constituent Assembly during which Jaipal Singh Munda had unequivocally declared that they wanted the “Adivasi” word in the Constitution. “We would settle for nothing less than that,” he said. The word “Adivasi” was inserted in Article 13(5) of the Constitution. Babasaheb Ambedkar did not want that the word to be included in the Constitution. Some say that Babasaheb feared Dalits going with the Tribals if the latter were called the original inhabitants. Babasaheb also said that the word “Adivasi” had no meaning.

**Do you have any references to support your claim?**

Yes. He said during the debates in the Constituent Assembly that the words “Adivasi” and “Untouchable” have the same meaning. This means nothing. He himself faced great persecution. I feel that he did not get the time to study the tribal community, to understand it. I am saying this because in one of his speeches he said that the government should work for the development of the “uncivilized” tribals. Why uncivilized? Why did he have such a negative perception about the Tribals?

It was not negative. Dr Ambedkar was deeply involved in the problems of his own community. Tribals were not victims of untouchability. So, first we should bring the debate in the Constituent Assembly to light. There were many others in the Constituent Assembly besides Ambedkar and Munda. So, we cannot make this charge against Ambedkar.

I am not making any charge. I am just trying to understand things. Ashwini Kumar Pankaj has written a book that says all this.

I also have talked to him about this. I told him that when Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were being discussed in the Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar was standing by both.

See, I consider it wrong to categorize Tribals as a caste. They are not a caste. Calling them “Anusuchit Janjati” is wrong. It should be “Anusuchit Jan”. Today, caste certificates are being issued to Tribals. When you are not a part of the caste system, why do you need a caste certificate? They should be given certificates saying that they are Tribals or belonging to the tribal race.

Another thing, whether it was Ambedkar or Nehru or Jaipal Singh Munda, all were educated in the West. They learnt about liberalism or democratic liberalism or Western liberalism from the West. On the one hand, we took lessons in democracy from the British; on the other hand they had colonized us. This is mutually contradictory. Similarly, “aboriginal” and “uncivilized” are used to describe the same people.

Describing Tribals as aboriginals may have been negative but it put the others in a difficult situation. It meant that the Tribals were the original inhabitants and that they came later. But from the very beginning, they have not considered Tribals as humans. At best, they considered them a slightly developed animal. So, this is the reason tribal issues are not centre stage today.

When we analyze the Ambedkarite movement, people say that it brought about a social revolution because Babasaheb called upon Dalits to shed antiquated traditions and march forward. Shouldn't the Tribals do the same?

No. There is no question of tradition here. Since the Tribals are not a part of the caste system, we don't need to shed anything. This misconception arises because of the lack of exposure to tribal philosophy. This is why the Tribals were suppressed. When you want someone to give up something you simply paint a negative picture of it and that person will himself abandon it. This was what was done with the Tribals. No society is as equal as tribal society. They have both social equality and gender equality. Among tribals, when a prosperous farmer employs a poor man to work his fields, he works shoulder to shoulder with him. He eats food with him, he celebrates festivals and happy occasions with him, he invites him to his place and he visits his place. Just see what happens in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and other states. There is nothing like this anywhere. In fact, there is discrimination on the basis of the rich and the poor. Secondly,

tribal girls choose their own life partner. And what happens in your civilized society? Lakhs of women are burnt alive, murdered for dowry. Girls are not allowed to be born; and if they are born, they are killed. This is your civilized society?

The way you blocked the CNT [Chotanagpur Tenancy] Act through your relentless struggle is an example for other states. What changes was the government bringing about in this Act?

The issue is not limited to CNT alone, it also includes SPT [Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act]. They were trying to amend sections 21, 49 and 71 of the CNT Act and section 13 of the SPT Act. The first amendment pertained to declaring agricultural land as non-agricultural. This was a very dangerous game and they were playing it very shrewdly. As soon as Modi and his team came to power, it amended the Land Acquisition Act. They did it thrice. Why did they do it? Because the Rehabilitation Rules 2013, framed under the Act, clearly stipulate that there will be no acquisition of land in the Scheduled Areas unless it is very essential. Secondly, even if land is acquired, it should not include agricultural land. And in case this has to be done, you have to provide agricultural land of an equal area to the farmer. So, what did they think of doing to circumvent this problem? They wanted to acquire the power for declaring agricultural land as non-agricultural. Now, if they moved court, they would argue that it was non-agricultural land and they had the power to acquire it. They have still not repealed section 49. We are still fighting for it. According to this section, they can acquire land for industries and mining. It says that the land that has industrial and mining infrastructure, can be regularized by paying one per cent tax within a period of three months. That is why businessmen unitedly support the BJP; that is why they provide funds to the party. And in a quid pro quo, the government protects them. They fear that if in the future, the tribals become judges or enter the government, they will get the mining and industrial infrastructure on tribal land razed. Their objective is to facilitate the businessmen. They want to grab whatever land remains.

In Jharkhand, the leadership of the movement is in the hands of Tribals. In other states, non-tribals are leading the Tribals. Your take?

Efforts are being made here, too. Others are trying to take over the leadership. But whenever they try, the tribal community throws up one

leader or the other. That is because Jharkhand has a 300-year-old history of agitation and movements. Writers, litterateurs, poets and historians have all cheated the 'Tribals'. They say that 1857 was the first war of Independence. Then, what about 1855 when 15,000 Santhals were killed, Sido and Kanhu Murmu were hanged? Those who are wearing their patriotism on their sleeves – let them point out a single place where they had declared that the British rule was not acceptable to them. The Tribals did that. Sido and Kanhu had the support of 60,000 Santhals and they had told the British in clear terms that they are their own rulers, that the rule of the British was not acceptable to them. When the British opened fired on them, they took the bullets on their chest. Talking of the even earlier times, in 1770, the British told Baba Tilka Manjhi and the hill Tribals that they would have to pay land revenue. The Tribals' reply was that land, water and forests were the gift of god and they would not pay any tax on them. When the demand for Pakistan was being raised, Babasaheb demanded Dalitsthan. Then, Jaipal Singh Munda also demanded Adivasisthan. But their Adivasisthan was not like Pakistan or Dalitsthan. They said that they wanted to live in India but they should be given autonomy in their areas. There should be no government interference in these areas.

Dr Ambedkar was saying the same thing. He was not demanding a separate Dalitsthan. But the main problem in India is its electoral system. Non-tribals are posted in tribal areas. Non-Muslims are getting elected from Muslim areas. How will they work when they don't understand the pain of the people they are meant to serve? So this is a major lapse on the part of Parliament for which everyone is responsible.

Sometimes I feel there was no discussion at all between Babasaheb Ambedkar and Jaipal Singh Munda. I haven't come across any mention that they met outside the Constituent Assembly or held discussions. Just imagine, had they met, had they forged a common strategy, the condition of the tribals and the Dalits might have been different.

After Independence, Dr Ambedkar worked in tandem with many others like Dr Ram Manohar Lohia. They held discussions on how to free Dalits and the other poor from poverty. Dr Ambedkar died in 1956. This was a big setback. But what about Captain Munda? He was ignored.



I feel that though he [Jaipal Singh Munda] was in the Congress, in his speeches, which are available in writing, he targeted the Savarnas. He said that the Savarnas did not want we Tribals to progress. So, Jaipal Singh Munda understood this and after the formation of the Jharkhand party, he won 32 seats. This put the fear in the Congress that they could become a major threat for them in the future. So, Congress started suppressing them. Secondly, Dr Ambedkar's friends and others have written much about him. But no one wrote anything about Jaipal Singh Munda. Instead, some began deriding him. Later, the tribal leaders also did not talk about him – whether it is Shibu Soren or Babulal Marandi or anyone else. You see, at that time he had won nine gold medals. He was until then the only Tribal to captain an Indian sports team. When the movement for the creation of Jharkhand state began, the RSS and the BJP were the first to oppose it. They said that we wanted to Balkanize the country. And now, it is they who are enjoying it the most. The RSS-BJP do politics of religion. The day conflict over religion ends, the BJP will be finished.

**Don't you think that every major movement has to take the support of one or the other religion? Dr Ambedkar, for instance, chose Buddhism.**

You see, the RSS was born in 1925 and the work for organizing the Tribals had begun in 1915-16. Jaipal Singh Munda emerged as a political force in 1952. RSS achieved that status only after 1980. But it is now ruling the country. When Jaipal Singh Munda and his group constituted the Adivasi Mahasabha, they became very powerful. They raised the same basic issues (language, culture, identity, water, forests and land) that are relevant even today. But a big folly on their part was converting Adivasi Mahasabha into Jharkhand Party. Due to this, the Adivasi Mahasabha lost its identity. What they should have done instead was that they should have taken the Mahasabha forward; Jaipal Singh Munda should have handed over its leadership to someone else and founded another organization for doing politics – just as the RSS had done, and which we are trying to do now.

Secondly, we are working on tribal literature. Literature has killed off Tribals. Nothing was written about them. Or whatever little was written was full of inaccuracies. It was said that the Tribals are barbarians, they are illiterates, they move around naked. This was a conspiracy to obliterate us. But now we are writing what is true and we are rebutting what is wrong.

There is this talk of the Dalits and the Tribals coming on a common platform.

If we are talking about the long battle and the pan-India context, we have launched a Moolniwasi movement. I believe that this is necessary. There should be unity. We cannot fight separately for a long time because if we are divided, we will be sitting ducks for the enemy. But a lot of spadework needs to be done for this because the issues are different.

Looking ten years ahead, don't you think that tribal life is the best, especially in view of the blind race for development we are witnessing today? What do you have to say?

Over the past three-four years, I have been travelling to Europe frequently. There, people tell me that if we are to continue living, we will have to lead our lives as you do. Around 25 families of London have shifted to the forests of Wales. They are living in small houses. They don't want internet or mobile. When I asked them why they are doing it, they said that what was being described as development was actually insanity. When this Earth won't survive, how will we? Hence, if this world has to be saved, we will have to tread the path of tribals.

The growing population of outsiders in Jharkhand has become a big challenge for the Tribals. Your take?

Under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, there should be restrictions on outsiders settling in tribal areas. But when we advocate it, people quote Articles 19 (1) (2) (3) (4) to argue that every Indian has the right to settle anywhere in the country, to work anywhere. But they do not talk of 19 (5) (6), which allow a state to impose restrictions on outsiders.

How does the media look at Tribals?

The media publishes news about Tribals only when it thinks it will sell. The media sees them as a product. It is the most intellectual but at the same time the most racist institution in the country. You won't find a tribal news editor or bureau chief in the tribal areas. All of them are outsiders. Some of them cannot even write Hindi well. But they are there. This is shameful for the media. They have barred the Tribals, though you will find tribals occupying top positions in many other fields.

### **Why is there so much emphasis on privatization in India?**

This is a shrewd move, because when you complain why reservations are not being given, they can say that the institution concerned is privately owned. How can we give reservations now? You talk of merit. Are Dalits and Tribals lagging behind in merit? Then, tell me, there is so much corruption in India. Are the Dalits and the tribals looting the country? You ran the country for 70 years. Could you solve even one problem? Just tell me one scheme, one programme that was implemented 100 per cent. They build roads and they are in pieces within two years.

### **What are your future plans?**

Saving the tribal land, water, forests, languages and culture of the Tribals – for this, the tribal community will have to turn intellectuals. I hold the view that the battle for saving the Tribals should and will be an intellectual battle. The day an intellectual revolution comes about in the tribal community, it will become invincible. Today, they don't know the law. They don't understand how the government is grabbing their land. They do not understand the new laws. On the one hand, the BJP presents itself as a well-wisher of the Tribals; on the other hand, it is killing Tribals in Chhattisgarh, branding them as Naxals. Their women are being raped. And this is happening in a state where the BJP has been ruling for the past 15 years. The Tribals will be able to understand all this only after an intellectual revolution. They will be able to analyze things.

Secondly, people say that conversions are taking place. Christians formed 2 per cent of India's population in 1951. The 2011 census also says that they are 2 per cent. Where is the question of conversions then? The Christian missionaries run the highest number of educational institutions in the country and children of other religions also study in them. If these institutions were involved in conversions – as the BJP and the RSS say – then the Christian population would have increased. If not more, they would have been at least 10 per cent. All the movements being run by the RSS and the BJP are based on lies.

**Shouldn't Parliament apologize for the atrocities against the Dalits and the Tribals?**

One day, they will have to apologize. That is why we are conducting so much research. If you won't apologize on your own, we will make you apologize. The day the Dalit-Tribal-OBC unity is established, the rulers will have to apologize for doing injustice to us. That is why cases are being filed to silence people like us. We are being stopped.

**Should others also join this battle?**

Yes. There is no problem with that. But I have a problem when the non-tribals want leadership. People like Medha Patkar and P.V. Rajagopal – there are others also. I salute them. But why do they want the leadership? In her writing, Arundhati Roy wonders what the Tribals would have done without the Maoists. How can she write that? And that too about the Tribals, who did not allow the British on their land, who forced them to retreat.

I will give you an example. Gandhi Foundation, London, had to honour two Indian Tribals. And whom did they choose – Bulu Imam and Dr Binayak Sen. I salute their work. But the honour was meant for Tribals. I objected. I wrote to them asking why they couldn't find two Tribals from among the 10 crore of them in India? What they told me was astonishing. They said that they were given in writing that there was not a single Tribal in India who could come to London and express his or her views in English. Then, I wrote another letter asking whether the two individuals proved more than a match for 10 crore Indians. I said that if they wanted to honour those two people, they should not have invoked the Tribals of India. I wrote that this was an insult to the Tribals and they should apologize. And they did apologize. Initially, some people welcomed me with open arms. These greedy people were thinking I would play into their hands. But when they realized that I would do what I felt like, they started ignoring me.

Someone asked, "What problem do you have if Dr Sen is being honoured?"

What problem could I have? Let them give the Nobel to him. But this honour was meant for Indian Tribals. Then how non-tribals got it?

Some people say that you have personal issues. Like that about your passport. You raise them frequently?

No, there are no personal issues. My passport was seized thrice. There are some IB people who tell me that my passport was seized because I had made Saranda a major international issue. There was no personal issue involved in the seizure of my passport. What happens is that as you rise, you create more and more enemies. Some people are jealous of you. They will try to put you down by raising personal issues. Let them be. This happens. I have my own commitments. I will fight for society till I am alive.

You have struggled a lot in your life. Tell us about your struggles.

My family was very prosperous. My grandfather was a teacher. He was also involved in social work. He was famous locally. He had two sons – my father and his elder brother. My village is Birni, very close to the Kelaghat Dam in Sinder. When my grandfather got a job, he moved to another village. There, he worked as a teacher and did some other work too and bought 10 acres of land. He thought that if he settled his two sons in different places, they would not quarrel over land. The dam was built in 1980. I was not born then. The entire agricultural land in my ancestral village was submerged. We got some money. A case is still pending in the court. My father was forced to move to the other village after my grandfather's death. So, the land that was purchased for one brother had to be divided between the two brothers. My father's elder brother got a job. Our situation was such that there was not even enough to eat in our house. I was very young. I remember that my father brought wood from the forests and sold it at a place 17 km away to arrange for food. Then, the forest department foisted cases on my father saying that he felled trees. The police came and took away my father in the night. At the time, my mother's arm also got fractured. After my father was released, he filed a case about the land in a court in another village. Later, he became a Munshi. He won the case. The other party comprised many people. When, on 20 June 1990, my father and mother were going to court, they were murdered in a valley that fell between the village and the court. Our relatives took us four brothers and sisters into their various homes. I was barely 12 at the time. I was studying in standard eight. Later, I came back to the village. Everyone, including the teachers, knew me. I was kept in a

hostel. Then, I quit the hostel and started living in the village. There, I started studying in standard nine. I grew crops to purchase my uniform and books. I passed the matriculation examination but could not arrange Rs 250 for paying college fees. So I could not get admission. I then started working as bicycle mechanic. I lived with my father's elder brother. I also took his buffaloes for grazing.

My sister lived in Patna. She worked for just Rs 900 a month. When she came to the village, someone told her that she should take me to Patna, for otherwise my life would be ruined. So, my sister took me with her to Patna. But she did not earn enough to send me to a regular college. She had me admitted but I could not attend classes. So, I started studying in the library of an organization called Ekta Parishad. Pradeep Priyadarshi was the director of the Parishad. One day he called me and asked how I could sit in the library just like that. So, I started sweeping the floor and cleaning the toilets of the library. If there was a visitor, I used to prepare tea. They saw that this boy is doing all this for free. So, he asked me to take care of the library and do whatever I was doing and said that he would pay me Rs 500 per month. When I started getting Rs 500 per month, I learnt typing. Then, I joined English language coaching. In six months, I picked up a little English, not much. At the time I saw that the people who had hired a labourer were giving him food in another plate – like they would do to a dog. At the time, I visited Bhojpur for the first time. I worked with the Dalits in Ekta Parishad. Then, a case came up which filled me with great self-confidence. It was a case related to a farmland. The savarnas had broken the leg of a Dalit woman. They came with her to our office. There was no one at the office then. I did not know what to do. “Let us go to the Naubatpur police station,” I said. The policemen did not register an FIR. I went to the police station in-charge and argued with him, though I was afraid. But I succeeded and the FIR was registered. Those who were booked, they were staring at me; they were trying to threaten me. I did not know their background, so I wasn't afraid. I came back home. The next day, I was praised effusively at the office – that this little boy had the FIR registered and that too against musclemen. After that, the people of the organization started sending me out for fieldwork.

How long were you at Ekta Parishad?

For around five years. I passed my intermediate exam. Then, I learnt how to operate the computer. There was a problem. The director asked me, “How can you possibly learn here to use the computer?” There was a father. He said that since I knew typing, I could work for him and get paid Rs 1,000 per month. That was a challenging time. I had to pay room rent and the college fees with just Rs 1,000. But I had the passion. For six months, I attended a computer class during lunchtime. Then, I got an opportunity to study at the National Centre for Advocacy Study. That brought about a change in my life. There, Dr Gyan Prakash was giving a lecture on Anthropology. I knew nothing about Anthropology. My knowledge of English was also rudimentary. The other students had studied in good colleges. There were one or two friends who had a similar background but they too had attended college. I only had a degree. I felt that it was the end of the road for me. If they asked questions, I wouldn’t be able to answer them. That day, when I went to my room, I could not sleep the whole night. I kept thinking that this was a golden chance for me and I decided that I would study only English for the following one year. After six months, I wrote an article. It was titled *A World called Equality*. It was about Dalits. I had worked with them and at the time, in 2002, some Dalits were lynched at Jhajjhar. That article was published in a national magazine called *Indian Currents*. John Dayal was the editor of the magazine. He praised the article. Then, I went to Orissa for my dissertation. I lived in the forests for six months and researched on forest rights. I worked in 10 villages populated by Truvaks. There, some RSS people came after me. They had a news item published in a newspaper that conversions had begun in the area. Then the Graham Staines incident happened. I feared that they would burn me alive. I came to Jharkhand and became associated with the Ekta Parishad again. We organized a month-long cycle rally during which we raised questions on human rights. We went from village to village, from forest to forest and fought for human rights. We took cases to courts, to commissions. We went to the areas from where people were being displaced. We made them aware. Then we studied the documents and wrote about the cases.

How many books have you written so far?

Around 15 – three of them are in English. I write mostly in Hindi. I write small booklets so that they can reach the people living in rural areas. I write in English so that the world can know about the pain of the Tribals



# JYOTHI RAJ

Rural Education Development Society, Tumkur, Karnataka  
India

*Dalits are eco-people who live in complete harmony with nature.*

Jyothi Raj born in Chennai, Tamilnadu in the year 1953. At the age of 13, she came in contact with the high school Student Movement called Young Student Movement and began her leadership experience as a school secretary for the movement. At the age of 14, elected to the post of district president and managed 30 schools in Bangalore. It was during this period the inspiration to do something for society touched my life. In the year 1972 decided to volunteer to get involved with the student movement at the national level and in the same year elected to the national team from the national council of students. For three years from 1972- 1975 (Left home and education for three years) travelled across the country, (Especially Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh including the present Telengana, Tamilnadu, Orissa, West Bengal, Bihar, Present Jarkhand, Chattishgarh and Madhya Pradesh) organising and training students leaders and animators to build a better India.

After world war two, students in Europe played a vital role in the reconstruction of the world. High school and college-level student movements in India too played an important role in this process. The Christian schools and colleges along with their committed teachers, priests and nuns became the animators in the movement went out of their ways to relate to students and inspired them in their formative stages of life. By the time I reached the age of 20, met many such good hearted and eminent personalities in my life who have inspired me and kindled the desire to share my talents and strengths towards building a new India.

My social involvement started with a simple question "Who am I"? What am I today is a partial answer to this question. At this moment I want to register my gratitude to all those who have come and gone into my life. Many have gone back to Mother Earth. I fondly remember my first visit to Patna, Ranchi, Bettiah Muzafpur, Hazharibagh etc especially the tribal belts in the early years of 70s. Travelling to these places all alone was an amazing experience at that tender age. In fact, I wanted to spend the rest of my life in the tribal belt of North India with Tribal communities. But, unfortunately, I could not do it as I was away from home for a long period.

In 1975, returned to Bangalore and joined college again with the same sisters (Jyothi Nivas College) and continued my studies. Also continued my involvement with college students' movement through AICUF. Completed my master's in sociology at Manasa Gongotri Mysore University and PG in Human Resource Management from Indira Gandhi University. It was in the year 1982 I met Raj and decided to continue my involvement with the poor and the marginalised for the rest of my life. For one year we were with PEAL in Madurai and then we were invited back to Karnataka as the need for carrying out such a work was in demand.

It was in the year 1984 we stepped into Tumkur and started our journey of development with the poor and the marginalised. It was here in Tumkur that we rediscovered our roots and learnt the lessons of life sitting at the feet of our people especially the women. It was at this time that we realised that all our university education did not mean anything to us. Our people became our University and we continued to learn from their lives. Over a period of 36 years in Tumkur we learnt to be humble disciples of our people. The strengths gained from our people, the success stories that we have achieved were shared with rest of our friends in 28 states of the country and 24 countries in the world. The most cherished experience was the declaration of Ambedkar Yuga in the year 2000 where Mr. Prakash Ambedkar the Grandson of Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar was personally present and declared the Yuga. This resurgence and the assertion of the unbroken people went down in the history of Tumkur and Karnataka.

**Dalit Panchayat Movement in Karnataka? What is it? When did it start? What is the philosophy behind it? How it has helped the Dalit community?**

REDS was started in 1984. The impact of REDS in the first decade led us to start the Dalit Jagruthi Samithi(DJS) in 1994. The cumulative impact of REDS and DJS brought the Declaration of Ambedkar Era in the year 2000 leading to the establishment of Booshakthi Kendra the first ever Dalit ashram in India in the year 2003 and Dalit Panchayat Movement in the year 2004. In the year 2014 the Dalit Panchayat was renamed as Adijan Panchayat. The purpose of the Dalit/Adijan Panchayat Movement is to revisit and reclaim the unbroken history of the Dalit /Adijan people of India.

Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar preferred Dalit identity for historical and psychological reasons. The dominant caste forces in India had ascribed many identities to the Dalits in order to subjugate them and later to make the society at large as well as the Dalits internalize these dominantly churned out identities. When the ascribed identities became commonly accepted some of them became assumed identities. For eg. Raakshasas, Asuras, Chandalas, Panchamas, Untouchables, Unseeables, Harijans, etc. These are degrading and inhuman discourses from the dominant forces.

We may not go into an analysis of the possible hidden agenda behind each of these ascriptions. However, we must note that these identities are external to the Dalit people. They are not natural identities. These are not innate arising out of certain characteristics from within the person or the community. Since these identities remain with the ascriber and did not with the Dalits themselves these can be called false identities.

For no fault of their own the Dalit people were subjugated in the course of history in their own land as is the case with most indigenous people across the globe. The subjugation of Dalit people is the consequences of many carefully designed and executed projects of dominant caste forces. All the projects were aimed at the denial of basic and fundamental human rights to the Dalit people so as to 'break their backbone' of dignified and human existence. We understand that Babasaheb did not want any of the ascribed identity for the Dalit people as it would mean an internalisation of subjugation. He wanted an identity that will be nearer to historical truth (Broken People) and will not further consolidate the inferiority complex that was consequential to the caste system.

The question is what were the Dalit people before becoming historically broken by caste system? The simple answer is that we were unbroken

people. If the Dalit identity came to us as a consequence of our historically becoming broken we had an identity as an unbroken people. Dalit liberation will go many steps forward of the innate unbroken identity of the now Dalit people is pulled out of the crumbled citadels of Dalit Indian history. If the world has to rescue itself from becoming completely submerged in the brokenness that has now become the historical identity of Dalit people, it has to look at the unbroken identity of the Dalit people as an alternative. The unbroken identity has to be pulled back into our times and made the foundation of governance of the future.

When we look at the core characteristics of the unbroken people we realize that their governing value premises transcend the limitation of time and the contour of the state. The governing values of the communities of the unbroken people are based on primacy of women with matriarchal foundation in contrast to women as sex objects with patriarchal foundation. The unbroken people never believed in violence and weapons of mass destruction. They believed in providing unlimited space to all without any boundaries rooted in the power of wisdom and marked with the identity of protest. Therefore, we are speaking of an unbroken civilization that provides unlimited space to all people. When we speak of returning to the unbroken quality of existence we are not taking a retrograde step into the past. This is a revolutionary step into the future as an egalitarian society with unlimited space for all people in the future.

Dalit people are eco-people. They still live in harmony with nature. There is no history of Dalit people destroying nature. There is no historical evidence to show that the Dalit people were ever oppressors of others except some pseudo liberate Dalits.

The history of land grabbing does not belong to the Dalits. They have only a history of loving their land that by a natural right belong to them. The history of subjugating women for sexual exploitation does not belong to Dalits. Being an eco people there is something in the Dalit people that does not allow them to evolve an oppressive and exploitative system of governance. This worldview is something that their ancestors have left for them. The best example is South Africa. The black people had to struggle hard to liberate themselves from the terribly enslaving white regime. The level of exploitation and discrimination was horribly high. It was not simply economical and political but social and psychological to a large

extent. Women and men, young and the old had to come to the streets, they were thrashed, mutilated and were butchered by the so-called civilized people. There was every reason for uncontrollable anger to build up in the black communities. Against all odds the black people gained their freedom. Naturally, they should have given a free vent to their bottled up anger and taken revenge on the white for the type of inhuman and barbaric treatment they received in their own land. But is that what the black people did? No. They constituted a Peace and Reconciliation Commission as they gained the political power to govern. It was not the white people who asked for reconciliation. It was the black people who were offering reconciliation at a time when they had all the power and opportunity to strike back in vengeance. They were just showing to the entire world the fundamental value of their governance. This is the fundamental character of the eco people all over the world. The power they have is not the power to oppress and exploit but it is a power to govern and make everything live.

We have not invented the Dalit Panchayat. We have only given a formal shape to an age-old practice in the Dalit communities. The concepts were simply lying buried within the Dalit communities manifesting only some semblance of life in them. Through an intellectual rigour and organizational discipline it was possible for us to infuse life into them. Raj and myself came to Tumkur with two backgrounds. I was experienced in organizing, through long years of involvement in the Young Student Movement of the 60's at the national level and was influenced by the pedagogy of the oppressed from Brazil. Raj had started off late by opting to live in a slum and work in a human rights organization in Bangalore in early 80's.

The sangha(union) of the poor was an eye opener for us. The poor of all castes would come for sangha meeting in a common place and speak a language that stirred our hearts no end. But when they finished their meeting they were back to square one. The poor of the dominant castes would go back into their houses and the poor Dalits would get back to their homes. In their homes the dominant caste poor were not poor but were either Lingayats or Vokkaligas, Nayaks or Gollas. The Dalits were Dalits. The dominant caste poor would sit with Dalits for meetings in a common place but would not allow them to enter their homes. Just few minutes earlier we were all sitting together, belonged to the same class and were speaking in the same language. But after the meeting when we went

to eat we belonged to different castes. The dominant castes would gather together in the evening and hatch their plot to grab high posts in the sangha so that they could pocket most of the benefits that came either from the government schemes or from REDS. The Dalits felt no better after the sangha meeting. They began to think that it is their fate that they should always play a second fiddle or no fiddle at all when it came to the village decision making.

We woke up to this stark contradiction in no time. Instead of talking about class we began to sit at the feet of our Dalit brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers and daughters and sons and began to listen to them. We realised that they had lessons to teach us that were not available in any written books. All of a sudden all our university education seemed to be useless. We sat with our local staff and asked them to educate us more. It required only a spark to realize the sharp contradiction that lay buried under the sangha. The union of the poor was a camouflage. The leaders of the dominant caste poor were masquerading as champions of all poor while they were only standing up for the poor of their caste.

It is historically true that the Dalit people are a broken people. This history continues even today. The dominant world looks at Dalit realities from its dominant viewpoint and stand point and never as a Dalit would look at Dalit realities. The dominant world applies many of its sympathetic paradigms to the Dalit future. The dominant world has also the habit of stereotyping Dalits. The evangelical endeavour of the dominant sections of society is to ghettoize the Dalit people and stoop down to do charity for us. This is simply because they do not want the broken people to break their shackles and let them go. But it is also historically true that many broken communities have managed to extricate themselves from the shackles of brokenness. If our brokenness has taken place in history it must have started at a point of time in history. If this is the case there was a time when we were not broken. We were an unbroken people in history too. We were a well civilized society with forms of governance that has no match today. Like all other civilizations ours also faced decadence and another uncivilized group took over our civilization to suit its needs. Today that very same group boasts of a superior civilization and has dumped us as uncivilized. This is the irony of history. If we have to liberate ourselves we will have to pull ourselves back into the future. This will necessarily mean reviving our history and culture and reordering our Dalit society in

tune with the unbroken life that our ancestors lived. Of course that does not mean that the past will come back to us with all its glory. It does not have to. We need to make our unbroken existence of the past as relevant as possible to face the stiff challenges posed by post modernist capitalism and casteism.

We discovered that the cumulative consequences of five thousand years of objugation of the Dalit people is, among many other things, the denial of the right to govern themselves internally as a community of people. The internal normative order of the Dalit community is very much alive within the communities. This is the internal strength given to them by their history and tradition and culture. They have a right to live by these liberating norms.

We evolved three phase paradigm, "Philosophy for Philosophy, Strategy for Strategy and Programme for Programme". The need was to make assertions drawn from our history and culture. We shall be guided proactively by what we are instead what we are made to be. When we shape our history by what we are internally in the core of our being others will be left with very little space to condition the shape of our personality. We emerged in this process of a creative search for alternative identification of internal strength drawn from our history and culture. The creative result is the creation of Dalit/ Adijan panchatyat movement in Karnataka.

We began to pull out one aspect after another of internal governance within the Dalit community and reconstructed it in the name of Dalit Panchayat.

In the context of internal governance, the British colonised India. But in every village in India is colonized by dominant caste forces. Even today the Dalit settlements are called colonies, Keri, cheri and harijan colony etc. We were never allowed to live our lives according to our history and culture and our internal normative order. Through consistent efforts of dominant caste and religious forces the Dalit forms of internal governance got submerged. Dalit history, culture, normative order and standards were buried under internal colonisation of Dalit communities. Hinduisation, christianisation and Islamization etc have added to the destruction of the internal governance system of Dalits. There is a need for the Dalit communities to evolve the internal governance system based on the history and culture of the Dalit people. However this should not lead to a

regression into the past. It should equip the Dalit communities to face the challenges of modern times. A significant instrument in the process is Dalit Panchayats.

Dalit Panchayat is constituted of all Dalit members of the community in a village. It is no more a colony but a Dalit Village. No Dalit in a village can be left out of the DP. Even if one refuses to be part there must be special awareness efforts to bring such persons to the DP.

The leadership of each DP must have ten selected members. All members of the DP should come together to select the ten leaders. In the selection of ten leaders, the traditional clan leadership must be respected. Dalit Panchayat leadership is drawn from the traditional community leaders called the Katte Mane. Gender balance and group representations are taken care of. However, in order to face the challenges of modern world young people with proven capacity must also be integrated.

Each DP leadership must have five men and five women. There can be six women and four men but not six men and four women.( To set right the historical wrong and conscious effort to promote women leadership in the movement)No DP will be officially recognised without the five women leaders. In the sanghas only those who want can become members. In the DP all Dalits in a village are automatic members of the DP with membership card.

DP is responsible to resolve the internal conflict of its people by itself. One of its major responsibilities is the restoration of land to the Dalit people and education of the girl children. It takes the responsibility for the promotion of community education and revival of Dalit musical instruments. It keeps a strict vigil for the banning of free caste labour. It does not tolerate any form of abuse of our women by dominant caste men as well as any form of domestic violence by our men.

On April 14th, 2007 the Dalit Parliament was established by holding a public election in the model of Proportionate Electoral System. Just then the research on Proportionate Electoral system was completed and the book Dalitocracy was released. 20,000 Dalit Panchayat members officially participated in the election. It was a private election but was held in a public place with the permission granted from the district administration and with full police protection and security to maintain law and order in the town.



28 election booths were set up for the voters to cast their votes. Membership cards as voter's ID was introduced. Ballot papers with name and symbols of candidates printed. Formal election commission was formed with eminent personalities. The ballot boxes were sealed and officially guarded. After two days an official counting in full public view was held. The entire district administration participated and witnessed the resurgence, assertion and celebration of the Dalit community. This was the second major event after Ambedkar Yuga. (achievement) By the year 2013, one thousand five hundred DPs were established including 12 other districts of Karnataka. Thousands of volunteers known as Booshakthi Sevaka and sevakis were identified and trained to manage their own DP.

In the year 2014, there was a serious question posed to the Dalit Panchayat Movement leaders regarding the unbroken identity of Dalits and why then we were holding on to the broken identity. After serious reflection process the movement decided to transcend from Dalit Panchayat to the Adijan Panchayat identity.

The word Adijan is an identity to Dalit people who have been inadvertently ascribed a broken identity. The Dalit identity indicates a broken past and present. The Dalit people are not a broken people as their history shows. They have been wounded in their psyche but not broken. Adi means original. In the context of a people it can mean the indigenous. Their world is centered round the earth and nature not as dominating agents but as co-travellers. They are very comfortable in the lap of the earth whom they have always considered and treated as their mother. This relationship with the earth as mother has especially marked the Adijan people as being very secure. The Adijan psyche is marked by an innate security. Since there is an innate security there is no urge to accumulate anything that will give an impression of security. The most essential quality of the earth which marks the lives of Adijan people is the provision of unlimited space to all people. This particular nature of the Adijan people is the one which has made them Dalits.

### **Impacts and achievements of REDS, DP and Adijan Panchayat Movement in Tumkur/Karnataka**

It is a well-known fact that the dominant caste society in general has infused a psyche of defeat and uselessness in the Dalit communities all over the country. It has never allowed the Dalits to taste success. If the

Dalit people's future has to be transformed there is a need to build more and more success stories around their life. When the present phase of success becomes a past for their children their future will be full of success. This is the logic of success that we have managed to integrate in our engagement with our people. Starting as a small community organisation of people we were aware intuitively that our people needed a psyche of success as they had been overwhelmed by a defeatist psyche. Something had to be done at that level. Therefore, we decided to take up only those struggles that our people were capable of succeeding. Therefore, we started with a few constructive development programmes wherein people's committees were formed. Their knowledge base was used as basic resource for designing and skills were used for execution.

Organisation of a few programmes such as a campaign on the education of children which caught the imagination of mothers and the assembling of 2000 poor for two days at that early stage of the awakening raised the expectations of the people as well as gave a reassurance that after all they could succeed in mobilising so many people if they worked hard. Where did they gain this success? They were raising the expectations from themselves and they began to own up the success.

Let me start with an interesting impact narration by Mr. Marirangaiah of Korategere taluk in Tumkur district way back in 1991. The incident relates to the visit of a representative from a donor partner from Holland to Tumkur. It was a meeting between the village people and this person from Holland. In the course of the discussions he asked the people as to what REDS had done for them. Among many who said different things to him Marirangaiah who is an illiterate said to him, "REDS has developed us by giving us awareness". The visitor latched on to this and asked Marirangaiah, "What is your development". He replied, "For me, development is to wear pants and shirt like you and wear a watch like yours". The visitor laughed and continued sarcastically, "So for you to have a watch is development? Will you be happy if REDS gives you a watch and stops with that?"

In reply Marirangaiah set out on a long discourse on what he meant by development, relating his discourse to a watch. "Listen Sir, you have not understood what I really mean when I say that having a watch is my development. This is the problem with you educated people. Before REDS

came into our village the landlord used to come and wake us up at 4 o'clock in the morning and take us to the field. We used to go to his field and work there. When we came back home it used to be 7 or 8 o'clock in the evening. After REDS came we formed a sangha in our village and began to analyse our situation. After realising our collective strength we now refuse to go to the landlord's field at the time he sets. Instead, we go to work only after 9 o'clock in the morning and return home by 5 in the evening. Formerly we used to look at the Sun to infer the time. That is no longer the case. Now our time is our own. Formerly our time belonged to the landlord. Now we have our time for us as well as better wages for our work. When I say having a watch is my development what I mean is that I have become master of my time and do not let the landlord dictate terms to us and about our lives. The watch is the symbol of our liberation from earlier bondage." When Marirangaiah completed his discourse not only the visitor but also the whole staff of REDS were astounded. There was silence at the amazing wisdom of this illiterate person who translated his experience into a beautiful paradigm. A few years later Mr. P. Sainath visited his village and documented their struggle against the practice of Untouchability, bonded labour, free cast labour and temple entry from human rights perspective. It was published in the Hindu national daily news paper.

The cumulative impact of the Dalit assertion, cultural resurgence cum political mobilisation of the Dalit people in Tumkur district has been manifold and multifaceted. The power to the powerless has enabled people, the capacity for negotiation and bargaining with the external forces. Direct interfacing contact and interaction with the government on issues related to land, welfare and amenities, struggle against untouchability and atrocity brought tangible impacts on the lives of the Dalit community in Tumkur. The Adijan Panchayats have focused their attention primarily on reclamation of human dignity as a right. 12,106.08 acres of land for 3813 families in 650 villages have been recovered through legal measures. The official value runs into multi-million rupees. All the land acquired has been put to agricultural use. Major untouchability problems have been reduced up to 80 percent (Eg two glass system in the village restaurants) and subtle forms exists outside the area of operation of Adijan Panchayats. Major atrocities on Dalits have been stopped in the district of Tumkur. Rare sporadic incidents do take place every now and then and the DPs are capacitated to handle such situations on their own. The common talk in

the district is not to touch the Dalits as they have REDS, Adijan Panchayat and Booshakthi Kendra. Free caste labour has been stopped in most villages. To safeguard their dignity now work for wages and sacrifice the little benefit that may come from free caste labour. Especially during the festival of Maramma the village deity. Stopping the sacrifice of buffalo during the festival was a big struggle and it was at a great risk. After many years of consistent effort now the district administration has taken over the responsibility of monitoring and stopping the sacrifice during the festival of Maramma. Of course all Dalits are not for it. The villages which are not part of the movement consider that Maramma will punish if we do not sacrifice buffalo and appease her.

The successes in struggles naturally led the people to venture into electoral battles. The first election to the Gram Panchayat brought them 55 seats. Never heard of it in their lifetime. The sanghas filed their members as independent candidates. Out of 116 candidates in their first attempt 55 of them won. Dalits winning on their own simply through their unity was not part of their psyche. In the next Gram Panchayat election they took the battle to a different plane together. The caste people came to them for negotiations as they clearly saw the unity of the Dalit Panchayats as a new investment in the village life. It was possible that the caste people and Dalits sat together for negotiations on seat sharing and vote sharing. A deal was struck. Together they filed 452 candidates. 261 of them won. Once again a great victory. 116 of them from caste communities and the rest were from Dalits. They had given dignity to the Dalits, recognised them as human beings, recognised their capacity for negotiations, and they recognised the power of their vote. The trend continues at all levels, the Gram Panchayat, MLA and MP elections. Consolidation of number into votes, votes into strength the biggest achievement for Dalits.

One of the biggest successes that the Dalit people of Tumkur tasted was the Declaration of this millennium as the Ambedkar Yuga(Era). It is only natural that the people, having come a long way in their success through assertion wanted to make one mega assertion to the entire society through the Ambedkar Era declaration. It was at the fag end of the 20th century that many people started speaking about a different Yuga. It simply occurred to us that we should declare the next millennium as a Yuga for Dalits. We named it Ambedkar Yuga. We did not bargain so much trouble and tension when we set out to make the preparation for the Yuga

celebration. Originally the plan was to mobilise 20,000 Dalits for the event. By a casual look at our past history it looked a monumental enterprise. We needed extraordinary courage and self-confidence to make it happen. We set out in right earnest. As the days were nearing it was decided to bring the grandson of Ambedkar to Tumkur to make the declaration. Both Raj and myself decided to directly get involved with the people in preparing them physically for the declaration. Therefore, we decided that while Jyothi would do all the ground-level programme preparation Raj would live in the villages with a team of 20 young people educating them on the nuances of the Ambedkar Yuga. It turned out to be a marvellous invention in the psychological history of our people in the district. Except for the cost of diesel for the vehicle the organisation did not have to spend any money for food and stay of the group for all the four months of sojourn in the villages.

The caste forces of the district began to get their act together. They caught hold of one of the Dalit leaders of the city and through him started a campaign against the Ambedkar Yuga. They started issuing statements in the press against the declaration. They travelled to far off villages and asked people not to attend the function on 10th January 2000. They threatened the people with bomb blast during the function. They rang up personally and met the guests asking them not to attend the function. All sorts of doubts were cast on our personal integrity. Camps were set up in a building in front of our office. There were threatening phone calls.

But nothing could deter our people. The Declaration of Ambedkar Yuga came in style. Four ministers of the Government of Karnataka, Prakash Ambedkar, Gopal Guru, Nidumamidi Swamiji, and a host of friends and dignitaries attended the function. 42,000 Dalits from Tumkur and a few thousands from other parts of India attended. It was a grand success by any standards.

Most people in Tumkur thought that the Yuga would never take place as the entire town was against the Dalits. It is just unimaginable that the Yuga could come about against such big opposition. They were people who mattered in the district. Yet, the Dalit people could pull it through in style. This was a total transformation in the self-confidence of our people in the entire district. This psychic transformation was a huge one. From then on the Dalit people of Tumkur district have achieved a marvellous story of

success in their history and now achieving success has become a habit for them. They could walk into any government office and police stations and establish themselves as legitimate Dalit leaders and get government development schemes for members of Dalit Panchayats. Millions of rupees worth of government schemes every year are being sanctioned for members of the Dalit Panchayats.

The position of women in the Dalit community in 1984 was one where the load-bearing of exploitation was more direct. The intensity of exploitation manifested in multiple forms, both personal and systematic sexual abuse of women in the event of caste conflicts was a normal phenomenon. This had an internal dimension too. The frustration of exploitation expressed itself in the form of women's exploitation within the Dalit communities. Now the participation of men and women in the Dalit Panchayat is almost equal.

Dalits have started celebrating their own festivals such as Dalit women festival on 3rd June, Booshakthi Festival on August 4th, Ancestor's festival on 6th December. Dalit spirituality is a very strong political assertion of the Dalit people. While sustaining the Dalit Community with its own identity, culture and history it will bring land, political power and social equality within the next 200 years. Tumkur has just set a model in the offing.

The 35 years of partnership with people has also enabled the internalisation of the concept of Dalit/Adijan among the communities of concern. In 1984, the position in communities was a total and submissive acceptance of their identities as schedule castes, Harijan and untouchables. As on date, the level of consciousness about the identity of Dalit as an equal human being with right to identity and dignity registered in the district. The conditions of exploitation related to Dalits were perceived as God's will. For example the practice of free caste labour almost in total quantum and intensity. Now registers a total change in the situation.

The external identity of the Dalit Panchayat/Adijan panchayat has contributed to an integration process among Dalits. The Holaya and Madhiga communities of Dalits have been able to reach a position of better integration between themselves. Because of this integration the exploitation of Dalits by non Dalits based on the division of Holaya and Madhiga and use Dalits against Dalits has been almost nil.

True to its nature the Adijan Panchayat Movement in Tumkur got involved in the climate change mitigation process through a very special programme sanctioned by the UN/ FCCCC. It is the first-ever Dalit programme in Clean Development Mechanism(CDM) of the UN. Kerosene lamps in 4163 families have been replaced by solar lamps. It is a 10 year programme implemented under the leadership of Adijan Panchayat leaders. Both women and men were trained to manage the running of the programme on a daily basis. Though it was meant for Dalits but the inclusive nature of Dalits included the poor from other caste groups too. This has changed the caste equations within the villages of Adijan Panchayats. In the beginning, there was resistance from the caste groups to allow the Dalits to enter their homes to install the lamps. Now Dalits freely enter the houses in case of repairs and replacements without any inhibitions.

One of the major achievements at the national level is the Campaign for Electoral Reforms in India. A 10 year campaign was initiated by REDS in collaboration with leaders from 22 states of India in the year 2008 and successfully completed in 2018 with the Declaration of the campaign into Proportionate Representation Movement in India by the ex- vice president of India the honorable Mr. Hameed Ansari in the capital city of India.

The Dalit spirituality is centred around the fundamental historical truth that we are a people of the Earth. Our ancestors worshipped the earth as Mother, because of the motherly characteristics of the earth. The earth is the provider and the protector. The earth is resilient. Our ancestors compared earth to the life cycle of a woman. As fertility in a woman is cyclic so is also the fertility of the earth. The earth keeps on providing life again and again in a cycle, just like the earth is the life giving energy of a woman. Therefore, our ancestors celebrated the earth. In this celebration, all references to human life was to the earth and to the cosmic power. Human life had no reference to anything beyond the cosmos.

Therefore, we worship the earth as Mother, because we derive life-giving energy from the earth and from other cosmic elements in the nature. Since our bodies are on this earth we derive our primary energy from the earth. The more we allow the earth and cosmic energy waves to interact with our bodies the more we imbibe the qualities of the earth. Those who are in constant communication with Mother Earth whom we call Booshakthi do not claim superiority over the other.

There is no doubt that the Dalits worshipped the power of the cosmos. Those powers are essentially related to what human beings can see and perceive. The Dalit perception of reality is an integrated whole. It has no split perception of nature of things and beings. We call Dalit spirituality as cosmosity.

The cosmos (cosmo centrisim) is all that we see, feel, touch and live by is the cosmos, the elements of nature, which we experience sometimes as powers of nature. Cosmosity is based on human knowledge derived from experience of life.

The Dalit spirituality has not created any myths of domination around Booshakthi. Booshakthi is not even a person though earth has a personality of its own. There is no story of incarnation and interventions in human history. Dalit spirituality believes that Booshakthi protects all her people and the entire human race is her people. Dalit spirituality does not classify human beings as good and bad, as superior and inferior, as pure and polluting, but all are equal with differences.

In Dalit spirituality we trace our origin to our ancestors. There are two major assertions behind the ancestor worship. The first assertion is that though our ancestors are dead and gone they continue to live amidst us and keep guiding us. The second assertion is that we shall live according to the norms and guidelines they have set for our communities. The essential understanding of Dalit spirituality is that we are born and we die. No one among us decided to be born. It will be the height of arrogance on the part of any one to say that he/she decided to come into the world. We might choose the time and method of our death but we will have no chance to turn back and see that we are dead. This is the irony of human existence. If only all human beings accept that the moment we die everything ends absolutely for us, how humble they will be. Such humility is in abundance in Dalit community.

What is the great deal in feeling so superior in this life when we know that at the moment of death we are no greater then the tiniest of living being. The realisation of this simple but tremendous truth will make all dominant forces to hang their heads in shame for presuming that their race will reign in eternity. The inability to acknowledge and accept this simple truth had led to inhuman wars and unbearable pains for billions of people.



We have no claim to any type of superiority because of differences. Our women, for that matter, all women are different from men. The way women feel is different from the way men feel. The way they think is different from the way men think. The way their body is structured is very different from the way the body of men is structured. Dominant religions say that women are inferior to men because of the differences that exist between men and women. The question in Dalit spirituality is this. How can women be considered inferior because of their differences with men? Our ancestors admired our women and attributed tremendous power to them because of their differences. Our ancestors worshipped our women because of their inexplicable differences. Our ancestors submitted themselves to the capacity of our women to govern families and communities at large. Our ancestors stood in awe of our women because they were able to bring forth new life into this world. This was not possible for men. Similarly, a man cannot beget a child at all and nurture a child the way a woman does. However much a man may love his child he cannot breastfeed his child, this can be done only by a woman. Can this incapacity of men form the foundation of the inferiority of men to women?

Cosmosity accepts differences not only between men and women but among all cosmic beings. However, these differences cannot form the foundation of discrimination and grading people as superior and inferior. The foundation of cosmic life is existence of differences. Differences are good to have in a world of multiplicity. The Dalit community is the embodiment of the holistic acceptance of differences and multiplicities.

Having accepted this, the Dalit spirituality rationally knows that the thought waves and feeling waves of our ancestors are in the universe and we draw energy from these waves in as much our bodies are tuned to receive these waves. In Dalit spirituality, there is no room for dominance of any kind. Our ancestors never aspired to oppress other people. There is no history that says that our ancestors were oppressive of any other group of people. There is no history of our ancestors indulging in mass rape of women. There is no history of our ancestors waging sue moto wars of mass destruction on other nations. There is no history of our ancestors evolving a system of caste to objugate a particular` group of people. If this is our history there is no ground to believe that we shall become oppressive all of a sudden. Dalit spirituality is the best bet for those who want to have a society without much oppression and exploitation.

Boocentrism refers to the centrality of the earth in life on earth. Earth in many Indian languages is Boomi. Let us for a moment think of the truth that the earth will go on living without human beings in it. Can human race imagine life without the earth? Human beings come and go but earth does not come and go. Earth will remain alive even after human race destroys itself in its manipulative arrogance. All living beings on earth receive life sustaining energy from the earth. Our relationship to the earth is substantially different from our relationship to the sun, moon, and stars. Our bodies are in immediate contact with the earth. However, the fertility cult of our ancestors was marked by a celebrating dimension rather than by a propitiatory dimension. It was a celebration of new life that was coming every now and then from the earth. It was the celebration of the availability of food and water in abundance. Propitiation was done by those who were frightened and those needed superhuman protection. For earth people whatever was new was another wonder of Nature. Strange people, strange events, strange things were all manifestation of the multiplicity of Mother Earth. Therefore they welcomed everybody and everything with a warmth that human history has not explained enough.

Dalit spirituality, which we call cosmosity, is a culture of looking horizontally, looking at one another in support and solidarity, being responsible to one another, relating to one another, belonging to one another, supporting the weak and nurturing the powerless. These do not come as noble philosophical and theological dogmas and doctrines. It is simply a way of life. But for Dalits and other indigenous people it is not culture that is a way of life. It is way of life that is culture.

Dalit spirituality is life and not rituals and slogans. Preservation of life in the cosmos, environment and ecology are the essence of this spirituality.

**How are Dalit/ Adijan women's issues different from the so called dominant caste women?**

I pay my due respect and appreciation to all my friends both in the Dalit Movements and Women's movements for their tireless achievements over a past 50 years in India. However, I have to share a few of my deepest thoughts and feelings towards the future of women's movements in India.

The common and binding factor is that we are all women. But, socially, economically, politically, culturally and spiritually we are different. Our

communities, our history, our thoughts and feelings, our intellect and the inner being, knowledge and wisdom are different from other women. There are internal and external factors to the differences to our identity. We have our own construction of world around us and fabricated external world around us. Internally we are unbroken women and for the external world we are broken women. The bondage within ourselves and outside are different from other women. Our psyche is different because of both unbroken internal factors and the broken external factors. So, understanding of Dalit women from this perspective is very important for Dalits, Dalit women and the entire women's movement.

The various forms and manifestations of caste oppression have taken away the human dignity from our lives. Being poor is different from Dalit women being poor. This reminds me of an incident which took place way back in the late 90's in REDS. One of the donor partners had come from Germany to spend some time with REDS. She had a meeting with the staff of REDS. Two of them were from Brahmin community. Each one made a self-introduction. All the staff said something about themselves. When it was the turn of one of the Brahmin girls in the group she mentioned her name and immediately supplemented it by saying: " I come from the highest Caste in India". The rest of the staff were shell-shocked into complete silence for a while. That was a manifestation of the sense of privilege. The discourse of high caste and low caste does exist in the Indian society and it is bound to have a ripple impact in the psyche of others. At that time she made it clear that others are different from her community. But she was poorer than the others in the staff. That does not matter. Economically weak but socially strong. She represented the reality of India. This may be an individual case in isolation and cannot be generalised. The question is not whether this is right or wrong but sends a very strong message that India is organised on the basis of caste whether we like it or not. Consciously and unconsciously it is being internalised by both dominant castes and the Dalits. The pride which is attached to the identity of caste is the foundation for personality formation of self and which gives the needed power to assert oneself as an individual and a community. The manifestation of self-confidence, self-image, self-respect are part of this assertion. Therefore, the atrocities, violence and discriminations faced by Dalit women are qualitatively and quantitatively different from other women.

Many Dalits in India genuinely believe that they are born in the untouchable community as a punishment for their sin. It is the curse of god that we are born in this community. Every thought and action of the Dalit is compulsively conditioned by this overwhelming sense of worthlessness. Rejection and brushing aside at every attempt to find a space in the general society further keep on reinforcing this worthlessness. As a consequence, the Dalit dares not to enter into public spaces even if they are available by a quirk of luck. What kind of self confidence and positive self image can one expect from people who are enslaved by inhuman system of caste and its manifestations?

Perception about women in all dominant religion has been a sorry picture of absolute subjugation by the male. The internalisation of the subjugation of women as a religious value and the meek surrender of women to their men are successfully strategized through religious doctrines and messages, all dominant religions have identical design about women. One such most abominable and nefarious practice is perpetrated on Dalit women in the name of Religion. Can there be a worse crime in human history than making women sexual slaves in the name of gods and goddesses? This is the Devadasi system. Sathyamurthy of Tamilnadu called the devadasis as the retainers of national art and culture and said that each Dalit family should dedicate one girl to be a future devadasi.

In the name of Devadasi system how many thousands of our women have been thrown outside the periphery of life by the dominant male of the caste groups? Outside of the Devadasi system how many of our women are raped repeatedly for reasons best known to all of us. Not long ago there was a conventional law in Tamilnadu that the women of Dalit community had to walk bare breast all the time. For some unknown reason, their men also had to pay a tax called the breast tax. This was not an ancient custom. It is about 80 years old. Raj witnessed the women in his family especially his mother having gone through this experience in life. The psychological damage done to Dalit women is the firm belief by women that their bodies were to be subjugated to and therefore not able to participate in life as equals.

Untouchability is one of the most unprecedented cruel and violent practice that one section of humanity has imposed on another section. Stringent constitutional measures will go a long way in healing the wounds in Dalits.

If the caste forces want this country to experience peace than they must tread the difficult path of removing untouchability as a religious dogma and the contribution of dominant forces as a psycho- social forces.

Some obnoxious practices of abusing Dalit women are still very much prevalent in many parts of the country. This is once again non-negotiable issue with the Dalit people. The women's movements in the country should provide the space and opportunity for promoting constitutional governance by challenging the caste governance in the country. Similarly, It should become a place for converting the compulsions into commitment to build a constructive India. The baggage that we carry at our back should be unloaded before we engage ourselves into action.

Manual scavenging across the country, even today it is a burning issue. What is the response from the movement? Dalits are left to fend for themselves. Expression of solidarity alone is not going to help, concerted effort to eradicate is the need of the hour for a dignified, just, human and better world.

On the contrary, in Adijan Panchayat the Dalit women are the symbolic representation of Booshakthi. Any insult to women is insult to the community. Any insult to the community is insult to Booshakthi herself. The great strength of the Dalit women is manifest in the magnanimity with which she has faced a triple oppression.

The Dalit woman does not see herself in any way being inferior to the male. The male equation do not work with her. ( Except the women who have been co-opted into dominant paradigms through dominant education and religious dogmas). The Dalit woman has no inclination to dominance. She has no time to keep reacting to all that happens around her. If need be she responds to the situation in a creative manner which would bring tangible impact in and around her. The governance for Dalit woman is a responsibility for others. It is power and authority not to dominate. Her strength comes from deep within and that is why the Dalit women are capable of withstanding any external threats and pressures.

What we need to recognize in Dalit women is the strength of amazing resilience. Resilience is the capacity to bear any pain and suffering. Resilience is forbearance par excellence. Resilience is the capacity to protect without harming anyone. Resilience requires a rock like strength.

It is not weakness. It is a conscious decision in humility. It comes from a sense of fulfillment in being part of nature.

The women's movement need to recognise the innate strength of Dalit women to play the needed leadership role in the governance of the movements at all levels.

Women being a source of life will necessarily mean taking sides with all that gives life and taking sides against all that destroys life, exploitation, oppression and inequality. It will also mean the setting of priorities for the women's movement for the future. Dalit movements and the women's movements must be ready to give their lives for the sake of the honoring of Dalit women.

Healing is needed in India. Both the oppressor and the oppressed are living with wounded psyche. Both need healing. Healing at the level of individual person, communities and India at large. Those who have created the problems of inequality and indignity have the responsibility to establish equality and dignity. If all people in a country understand why they behave the way they behave more than half healing has taken place. Ambedkar called nationalism as spirit of brotherhood/sisterhood. A nation with healed psyche will march forward courageously to redesign its nationalism to provide space for all people of the earth. We need empowered rudders that will navigate this country into the land of freedom and peace and not to be simple seekers of development and liberation.

India has to seriously get into the business of healing the wounds the psyche of her people to survive. It is possible for India only when the Dalits and the Adivasi people are respected as her citizens and are given their dignity, rights and space psychologically, socially, economically, culturally and politically. This is how the reconstruction of Indian nationalism has to take place.

Healing from grabbing of land, labour, dignity of the Dalit and Adivasi people. The hurt is getting accumulated, the healing has to start from within. The women's movement leadership has to seriously get into the business of healing. Healing from aura of superiority and purity leading to subjugation of women, Dalits, Dalit women and Adivasis.

India not only lacks an ideology of assimilation and integration but in fact has developed an ideology of disassociation and disintegration. The social

indicator in India point out to a declining readiness to recognise and accept the neglected sections of the society. The Dalits have a cultural identity distinctively different from other people. The identity of the Dalit people is not simply that of being poor. All who are poor are oppressed and therefore all the poor must be called Dalits. Not true. Our problems are not those of any other group which is poor. They are problems of enforced social backwardness, continued discrimination and economic exploitation.

The time has come for the women's movements in India to take a firm stand in establishing constitutional law in the country in the place of caste laws. To achieve this dream they have to join hands with Dalit movements and Dalit women's movement.

Constitutional measures in many part of India have led to the reduction of such insanity in India and they must continue. Women's movements should lead such struggles in India. Unfortunately the Dalit movements and the Dalit women's movements are left to fend themselves. Generally the issues of caste is looked at as separate from the mainstream struggles.

I consider the strength of Dalit women as valuable resource for the women's movement in India. The women's movement has to transcend itself to realize that Dalit women are not only victims of caste, class and gender oppression and discrimination but buried with everlasting internal strength which has to be unfolded.

If this is understood by Dalit communities, Dalit movement in general and women's movements in particular, I do not see any problem in including more and more Dalit women into the movements. There is no need to fight and push for space in the Movements and leadership roles for Dalit women. It would emerge naturally. I have a feeling that even the Dalit women have not understood sufficiently their own history and culture, their innate strength to consolidate and expand their legitimate space in the movements.

Therefore, the women's movements should become a platform or space for creating an alternative vision and worldview for the future in collaboration with Dalit and Dalit women's movement. It has to address and challenge certain assumptions from both sides. To build a new nationalism the understanding of knowledge and wisdom that are lying dormant among the Dalits and Dalit women must become an investment not only for the present women's movement in India but also to all others

in an attempt to build nationalism that has not seen the light of the day till now in India. We need a strong nationalism where all people will have their legitimate space intact for that matter the Dalit women must take up the leadership space within the women's movement for realising this transformation. There is a world of wealth in the Dalit community and

Dalit women. They must be made the best use to build peace and harmony in the society.

Professions of equality is different from practicing. In a caste society, the leadership invariably and always goes into the hands of the dominant caste. Perhaps the practice of Proportionate Representation in leadership should be introduced in the women's movement. Can the women's movement join hands with the Dalit movements and Dalit women's movements till at least untouchability practices were removed from the villages and social equality was achieved to a perceived level.

**When exactly was Booshakthi Kendra established and what was the idea behind it?**

It is important to understand the context behind the starting of Booshakthi Kendra. It is indeed a historical and organic evolution in Tumkur.

The longing to live among our people was always there. We decided to leave Tumkur town to live in a village many years ago. Our life and mission were bound by our people. Just as we visualised the Dalit Panchayats as an official forum for internal governance of Dalit communities we also took a long time to rationalise the need for a Dalit ashram as the cultural manifestation of the asserting, protesting and development capacity of the Dalit people. Just as anybody else we also had some allergic reaction in our body to the idea of an ashram. Though we must confess that Raj lived and studied in an ashram for more than seven years. Later we realised that ashram tradition originally belonged to the Dalit people. One of the first evidence is from Ramayana itself. The reference is to the ashram of Valmiki who was an untouchable Dalit. When Rama decided to send Sita away, he sent her to Valmiki Ashram. It is true on the one side that many ashrams in this country have lost their relevance to the oppressed people. Not only that, it is these ashrams that have laid many foundations for multiple ways of oppressing the Dalits. On the other hand it is also true



that many ashrams of the non-Brahmins, historically oppressed people have been the foundations of their liberation and development.

In Karnataka there are two powerful communities now that are at loggerheads with each other socially, economically, and politically. They match each other in every equation of power. One of the major reasons for their development is their ashrams. They were not exclusively religious centres. These were the symbols of the resurgence of their communities. Ashrams themselves became educational centres for their communities. Everybody speaks of absolute need for education of the Dalit community. But where are the centres of Dalit education apart from the government schools, hostels, colleges and a few private institutions here and there. Who owns the responsibility for educating Dalit children? Can all such responsibilities be pushed to the government, which is constituted of dominant caste vested interest? These two communities have a sway over the vote banks of Dalits. Whomsoever the Dalit community decides to vote in Karnataka wins election.

As symbols of a resurgence these ashrams also have served as strong rallying points for politicians, economists, business class, educationists etc. Each community find these ashrams as probably the only place where all of them can get together under one umbrella. These ashrams are the epicentres around which their community life revolves and have given that tangible identity and unity to the people of their communities. The sense of belonging and the physical security that it has guaranteed is of paramount importance in transforming an oppressed people into a resurgent people.

Our moving to Booshakthi Kendra is a responsible decision on behalf our people. In our understanding, from REDS it is DJS and from DJS it is Dalit Panchayat and Adijan Panchayat, and to Booshakthi Kendra. All these are organically linked. We are here to bring about larger changes in the systems and structures of governance in the country through our people. Booshakthi Kendra is visualised to become a Dalit/Adijan centre of learning and excellence. Dalit people of Tumkur District see BSK as an essential ingredient of their holistic development. BSK is the cumulative essence of their liberation aspiration and strategy. This has emerged out of rigorous dialectic movement between experience and intellect. The agenda

of BSK clearly shows that is for the business of the development of the Dalit people as a community of people with their human rights and dignity.

BSK is the outcome of many years of experience and serious intellectual exercise. It is the first of its kind in India. Understanding its paradigms and accepting them will take sometime. BSK is definitely visualized as an instrument of integrating the Dalit people into the society as equals with dignity and self respect. We have already seen strong indicators of the strength that BSK brings to Dalit empowerment. 14th April 2003, 6000 Dalit people gathered to lay the foundation for the BSK. 6th December 2003, 5000 people assembled to inaugurate BSK. Three networks at the state, national and international level have been initiated for land struggle. At present the state level network is active on four dimensions of land struggle. Land reclamation, restoration, protection and development. At the state level BSK succeeded in the inclusion of 5 acres of land to every Dalit family in the election manifesto of one of the major parties in Karnataka. Many land network organisations and movements have picked up the idea of 5 acres of land issue and it has been promoted in various forums both at the state and national level.

One of the major missions of BSK is to critically look at the worldview of the dominant society and evolve workable alternative based on the worldview of the present Dalit perspective.( Earth, women, cosmic, ancestor, community and body-centric worldview). It is not enough that we cry over the past and say that people have oppressed us. It is necessary now to make assertions of values, identity, rights, dignity self-respect etc.

BSK is a place for self-assertion of the Adijan people that we have a history and culture of our own which is different from all other dominant histories and cultures. It is not placed in opposition to any other religion or any other discipline though all religions are analysed without fear or favour. BSK aims at creating a long term and internally sustainable normative order based on the world view of the Adijan communities sustainable unto themselves. BSK proposes to do this development of the Adijan people through a long term development perspective building as well as through programmes that will translate the perspective into a chain of action-reflection and action perspective.

As in the past the major future concern of BSK is to develop an alternative young generation of leadership based on the time tested values embedded

deep in Dalit communities. Besides being the centre of developing an alternative leadership within the community BSK strives hard to address the issues that afflict the existing Dalit leadership. The focus here is the formal efforts to transform compulsions into commitment through counselling, personality development courses and personal accompaniment in conflict resolution.

Based on the visualization explained till now BSK started with some major activities. Two years live in training (Diploma course on Dalit Studies) to prepare some youth for lifetime commitment to their people. The content of the training was on the Human Potential Development of Dalits. Raj and myself have written a book on the methodology of this training. The goal of the training was to prepare the youth to gradually take responsibility for the establishment of Dalit Panchayats in their own respective places. The focus was also on building a creative and strong personality in the trainees to become a community resources. This Diploma training was one of the unique contributions of BSK.

BSK is a new strategy for the successful operation of the land struggle. BSK makes a serious attempt at this cultural integration of the Adijan Community in its intensive struggle for land. BSK's major objective is to evolve an internal normative order by establishing a strong community identity for the Adijan people all over India and gain community space for Adijan people within India.

BSK has something to offer as an alternative to the country, to the international communities in terms of values of governance, way of life, interpersonal relationships, inclusive space for all people of the earth.

You have been part of Women's land rights movement in India. Many suggest that Adijan communities live as collective and in community but now others are campaigning that women must be given ownership of the land. What you think on the issue.

This question has to be addressed in the context of the emergence of the nation-state. The external context is constantly changing. The nation-state provides the legitimisation of the position of some groups in a societal relationship to carry out its own scheme of things. One such scheme is the project of land grabbing. The enlightenment philosophy heavily focused on the liberty of the individual. The underlying paradigm is that the

community in which one lives does not matter anymore. The community should change itself rather than the individual keeping alive the roots, which constantly give life to him/her. The core of modern human existence is the transformation of the community of peoples identity into one of citizen identity. The citizen is an individual, he or she may belong to a community. It is irrelevant to the Nation-State, which assumes all people as individual citizens and ensures the right of the citizens at the level of the individual. The normative framework of a community and of the state is characteristically different. The modern state does not recognise any community as an essential ingredient. In a multicultural society, many safeguards and affirmative actions are guaranteed in the name of communities. However, the implementation of each safeguard is not given in the hands of the communities in question. The state takes the primary responsibility of implementing such safeguards and guarantees by itself to individuals belonging to the communities in question.

As Dalits and indigenous people we still believe that we are members of our communities and as long as we do not have community rights in the governance of the country and as long as we do not have the power and the space to influence governance our citizenship will be only an instrument of exploiting us. Actually we are losing the very same precious freedom and liberty in the name of citizenship.

Once the supremacy of individual was established it was imperative to follow suit with safeguard the rights of individuals. The liberty of the individual was essentially the freedom to invest, produce, accumulate wealth and make unlimited profit. The state was to become the instrument of liberalising the official policies and the body that would enact only those laws that would guarantee the liberty of the individual to invest and make profit. In the process, Dalits and indigenous people have become victims both strong and powerful individuals and their corporations. Over a period of time they have also become co-opted into the exploitative structures and systems.

The only option left to us while fighting for policies for community rights, alternatives at the level communities have to be established. The only hope is people at the ground level.

We are essentially born into a community. Our basic identity comes from our community. We are individuals but part of a community living. We are

a part of a worldview that is essentially communitarian. Our value systems are deep-rooted in our community and are derived from it. We believe in integrity with nature.

Community rights over properties and resources of the earth were unscrupulously transformed to powerful individuals and private corporations. The state had to protect the interest of individuals against the security of communities. The contradiction in the nation-state is the total neglect of the communitarian dimension.

It is mainly because of the extreme openness, which is prevalent even today in the Dalit communities that did not equip themselves well for aggression. Their warfare was meant for defense and for aggressive capturing of land. Land for Dalits is not a matter to be possessed by an individual or a community. It is a relationship. Dalit people who have had no hegemonic aspirations have always looked upon the earth as Mother and have related themselves to her in that manner.

The Dalit people, the tribal people, the black people, have constantly imbibed the power of Mother earth through their union with her. It is this power that has sustained them for millennia against continuous barrage of attacks from dominant forces. The indigenous people have established the earth as the centre of their lifeworld and continue to draw their life from the power of the earth.

The problematic in ownership psyche of the present Dalit people is two fold. As Adijans they were guided by a psyche of being owned by the earth, by nature, and by cosmos. This virtually did not infuse any psyche of ownership in them. Nor did it derive them towards increasing their ownership on material resources of the earth by hook or crook. They were not guided by an accumulation and grabbing psyche as they were self-content with what they had. Later, with the arrival of dominant forces they were never allowed to be owners of their own history and culture. The dominant forces started establishing their ownership over all dimensions of life one by one. One of the first and foremost thing they began to own was land. As a consequence the Adijan people were rendered landless people.

The ownership concept of Adijan people is very natural. Natural ownership refers to a worldview according to which everything in the world belongs to everybody. No one ultimately can own anything in the

world as one day or other all who are born will have to leave everything that they acquired and leave the world. This natural ownership is problematic to some extent in a fast-changing world. If all people of the world share this worldview humanity will be arriving at a psychic stage of total non-exploitation. Since this is not the case with the world and it is not going to be the case in the imaginable future there has to be a psychological pragmatism of living. If all people do not develop this psychological pragmatism in the world, as it has arrived now will be a place of increasing exploitation and oppression.

We have been dealing with recovering thousands of acres of land for our people in the villages. One of the most common reasons for the Dalit people losing their land to the caste people is not building up proper document for their land. Dalits apply for a certain portion of land in their village which usually belongs to the government. The government grants them ownership of land in public functions by sanctioning the land to them. In Dalit psyche, the moment a land is granted it belongs to them. Every year they go to cultivate their land. But one day something happens and their land is not theirs any more. We deal with hundreds of such cases where the lack of proper documentation had led to the loss of thousands of acres of land from the Dalits to the caste people. This is the story of all indigenous people in Africa, Latin America and in Australia. How did they lose their land to the whites and the caste people? Was it not because of the trajectory of natural or collective ownership?

One cannot ignore the historical fact that Dalits were never allowed to own anything after the arrival of dominant forces in India. Often enough there is nothing more that is left to be owned by the Dalits in terms of material resources. Even the little land that is left in the hands of the government for distribution is not being given in the ownership of present day Dalits. Dalits have been pushed to a state of non-ownership. As this has been happening for a few millennia it has come to affect the very innermost personality dimensions of Dalits. Deprivation of ownership has an inseparable link with appropriation.

Actually, the communitarian democracy must reverse the history of land grabbing by the dominant caste, class, race all over the world. However, it will not be pragmatic to set out to do it now. The ideal situation will be to have community land. However, the onus will be too big to achieve. The

communities in India do not live in contiguous areas. Therefore, it will only be romantic to dream of having community land for Dalits. It will be more practical to give 5 acres of land to each family. In the process of land development, the families within the community can decide collectively. Especially under the leadership of women. We are reflecting on experimenting with collective farming involving families with women farmers.

**How much of land have you been able to get to the people since you started the movement?**

The land struggle started from 1995 with the emergence of Dalit Jagruthi Samithi. Till date we have recovered 12,106 acres of land through various means. More than 60, 000 cases are in the process of reclamation. Each case approximately takes 8 to 10 years to reclaim. The legal processes are very lengthy. Our land struggle is basically on four major dimensions. Redistribution of land,(Policy) Restoration of land, protection of land(Legal Procedures) and land development.

**Land use and development- Ecological farming combined with collective farming by women and families**

Along with the land reclamation and restoration, the logical way forward for AP's is to get involved in land development to sustain life and increase the economic standard of life. Often there was this question from the visitors to Booshakthi Kendra and APM what next after the reclamation of land. Now we have the answer, ecological farming is the way forward for the AP's towards self-sustenance efforts. In the next three years, we plan to introduce and implement eco-farming at least in 60 families. Land has to be treated and redeemed from the heavy influx of chemical fertilisers. The health of the soil is completely destroyed and it has to be brought back to its original status. The knowledge and wisdom that they possessed is lost and it has to be revived. Farmers from Adijan Panchayats who are willing to take up eco-farming need to understand in detail the philosophy and the process involved in eco-farming. Therefore, trainings and exposures are an important component to promote eco-farming. The farmers have to be practically trained in the land and what they learn in these trainings will be implemented in their own land. Once again these trainings are also reclamation of their knowledge and wisdom regarding

land related issues. This is an ancient philosophy that the farmers used to practice and these practices were lost to the globalised world of chemicals and machinery. Convincing people to go back to the natural way of farming requires a model where they can see that this philosophy works.

Therefore, Booshakthi Kendra has developed a model of eco-farming and is lobbying with the government along with other network organisations and movements to promote eco-farming especially, to promote it at the level of women farmers in the state of Karnataka. Growing our own food is the need of the hour at least in the rural area. Producing for sustenance rather than for market and profit is the biggest challenge before us in the movement. Land and labour are the only resource available in the hands of the rural poor to face this huge challenge in the future. The average of the present farmer in India is around 60 years. Hence getting the younger generation into farming is another biggest challenge.

Women's land rights movements in India believe that land is not just a resource and asset but a source of women's security, dignity, identity and sustainable livelihood for themselves and for their families and communities. All of us know that it is the women who are the actual backbone of agriculture. But they are not recognised as farmers. Women constitute almost 65 per cent of total agricultural workforce in the country. According to 2011 census, 3.60 crore women are identified as cultivators. If they are recognised and given official identification perhaps there is a hope for collective and communitarian values to be retained by women. But, 87 per cent of women farmers do not own land. According to government norm only those who own agricultural land are recognised as farmers. The consequence is that women farmers are excluded from the process of formal agriculture.

The women's land rights movement at the national level are seriously working on the issue of land ownership (Individual, Joint or collective) based on the laws and policies of both state and central government. Under 9th five year plan 1997-2002, land distribution was prescribed to take land from the traditional land owners and allot it to the actual tiller of the soil. In most cases the actual tillers are women farmers. The problem is the gap between legal policies and women's recognition to land ownership.



Efforts towards recognising women as invisible farmers, re-establish sustainable agriculture and eco-farming, reclaim land for livelihood, ownership of land are taking place both at the state and national level. Establish a state-level commission on land to address land distribution, restoration, and protection of existing land and development with a specific focus on women's land rights and ownership, eco and collective farming.

Establish a land reform task force composed of government and civil society actors at the state level with 50 per cent of women to review land reform policy of India and Karnataka from the perspective of women and all marginalised communities to ensure dignity and social justice.

In fact in the year 2013, through the effort of Ekta Parishad the Congress government formed a National Task Force to address the ten demands especially to relook at the Land Reform Policy of India. I was the only Dalit and the only Dalit woman as part of the team. The women leaders from the land rights movement reworked on the Land Reform Policy from women's perspective and submitted the document to the government of India.. The government in power could have done something in favour of the poor, the marginalised and women in India. But due to the lack of political will nothing favourable happened. But, the issue was well captured by the people from the land rights movements in the country. In Karnataka, a similar effort was undertaken by Booshakthi Kendra, Dalit Panchayat Movement and REDS towards land rights for the Dalit people. 8000 Dalits especially the women gathered in Tumkur town and placed 10 demands to the then revenue minister of Karnataka. They also submitted 5,00,000(50 well bound books with 500 signatures each) signature demanding 5 acres of land to every Dalit family and later expanded this demand to all the landless in Karnataka.

**Why do you think Land Reforms important? Are they still relevant today?**

Yes Of course from the landless people's point of view. The spirit of land reform is to eradicate poverty and build a strong and prosperous country. Aims to attaining equality, social justice and dignity. It is one of the major political agenda of the country. From 1950-1988, eight five years periods were with us to implement the land reform but lack of political will it was not done. Survival has become a big challenge to the poor, Dalits, Adivasis,

women and other marginalised communities. Together with survival they have to constantly fight with poverty, malnutrition, insecurity and uncertainty in life. A piece of land and a home of their own is the highest aspiration of the poor in our country. Land should occupy the highest priority in the process of development of people.

Unfortunately the priorities of land reform shifted from people to market and to agrarian reform with market-led land policy. In general states' responsibility is reducing towards the marginalised people. Land revenue laws are becoming in favour of the land market. Land ceiling should serve the interest of the landless and not the land market with pro-market policy. Article 39(b) and (c) of the constitution that call upon the state to direct its policy to ensure " that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to sub-serve the common good and also that the operation of economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment"

**What have been the Land reform processes in Karnataka. How are these Laws important in the interest of the landless and Adijan?**

Government of Karnataka has been granting land right from the days of Mysore Maharaja since 1904 by making provision in Mysore Land Grant Rules and following reservation in land grant in favour of SC/ST. In the case of northern Karnataka, which was not part of the territory of the Mysore Maharaja, the Dalits were given what is called Inam land in view of their services rendered to the government. These land grants have been made with the condition that the lands should not be sold without the prior permission of the government.

The second initiative of the government of Karnataka for providing land to the poor is through distribution of surplus land declared under the provisions of section 66 of the Karnataka Land Reforms Act 1961. When the amended Karnataka Land Reforms Act 1974 was passed the government expected to distribute about 4 lakh acres of government land but only about 1.28 lakh acres were actually distributed due to improper implementation of the act. Out of this only 70,000 acres were distributed in favour of Dalits and Adivasis. Under section, 48A ownership rights were conferred on the tenants including SC/ST persons.

Regularisation of unauthorised cultivation of government land is another means of providing lands to the Dalits and Adivasis. Karnataka government had brought an amendment to the Karnataka Land Revenue Act 1964, for this purpose and more than 20 lakh applications have been received.

Another scheme of Karnataka government is "Land Purchase Scheme" implemented by SC/ST Development Corporation under the social Welfare Department. Under this scheme land is purchased by the corporation and distributed to landless SC/ST beneficiaries at the rate of 2 acres per family.

All these Schemes have not made significant change in the landholdings of SC/ST people. The dominant caste people have taken away the land either forcefully or by paying meager sum of money. Therefore, it became necessary to protect the granted land by bringing in legislative measures and accordingly the government of Karnataka enacted Karnataka SC/ST Prevention of Transfer of Certain Land Act 1978, in order to restore the land in favour of SC/ST. This Act applies to only government grant land. The alienated land through this Act should be restored to the original grantee or his/her legal heir. If there is no legal heir, then the land should be vested in government and distributed to SC/ST under Land Grant Rules. Major problems faced in the implementation of the Act are the slow pace of implementation and lack of political will. Therefore, though more than 40 years have been passed many cases are still pending restoration of land to the original grantees due to many reasons. There are also cases of physical threats and atrocities committed against the SC/ST land grantee, who are prevented from cultivating the restored land.

One of the recommendations placed before the government is to amend the existing Act so as to ban the transfer completely without giving permission for transfer of land till minimum holdings remain with the SC/ST grantee or till the grantee gets other substantial and permanent livelihood source.

The only available land for distribution is encroached by influential people. The provision of Karnataka Land Revenue Act provides for regularization of government land and invited applications. Lakhs of applications have been received and pending before the regularization committee at the Taluk level known as Bagair Hukum Committee headed by the MLA of

the constituency. This is the problem area and manipulations take place at this level in favour of the powerful.

In Karnataka, the practice of leasing land was in place among the landlords. They leased 2-3 acres of land to the landless. They were the tenant farmers. There was a campaign against this practice to abolish the land lease system. It was then the Chief Minister of Karnataka Devaraj Urs, passed mandates to abolish the land lease system and retain land to the tillers. The land redistribution took place in favour of the poor tenant farmers. Unfortunately it was applicable only to the land lease owners and therefore, it did not redistribute land to the all the landless in the state.

In Karnataka 60 per cent of land owners are with 2 acres of land and doing subsistence farming. The big land owners do not practice agriculture directly and hire labourers and grow mono and cash crops.

The latest amendment is the biggest blow to the rural poor farmers especially the Dalits in Karnataka. It looks and feels like that the poor are not in the agenda of the development paradigm of the government. The poor always are kept at the receiving end by emptying their resource base. One such attempt is the recent amendment to the Land Reform Policy of Karnataka. Till now we were proud and considered the land reform policies of Karnataka as progressive, pro-poor, pro-Dalit and one of the best in India.

But on June 11th 2020 the Karnataka Government(cabinet) decided to amend the Karnataka Land Reforms Act to remove restrictions on purchasing or owning agricultural land. Karnataka was the only state that had restrictions on purchasing agricultural land. During the budget session in March 2020, the government amended section 109 of the Karnataka Land Reform Act 1961 for acquisition of farm land for industrial purpose. The government has decided to repeal section 63(A) 79(a), (b) and (c) in the existing legislation to enable changes. Section 63 provides a family of 5 and below can buy agricultural land up to 54 acres and family of 5 and above members can buy up to 108 acres. 108 acres is the maximum ceiling limit. The new amendment says that a family of five and less can own 108 acres and a family of 5 and more can own 216 acres of land.

According to section 79(a) non-agriculture income should not exceed rupees 25 lakhs to buy an agricultural land. Before 1995, the ceiling on

income to buy land was rupees 50,000 and till 2015 it was rupees two lakhs. Now it is rupees 25 lakh. So far, the income limit was fixed to prevent the misuse of agriculture land. The latest decision is considered to be progressive. But the new amendment will allow anyone to buy agricultural land without any income limit. Till now only practicing farmers who owns pahani can buy agriculture land. Hereafter, anyone can enter into land transaction.

Section 80 does not allow agricultural land used for non-agricultural purposes. But the proposed amendment allows anyone wish to convert the land for non-agriculture purpose can appeal to the District Commissioner and if the DC does not give permission within 30 days it will be deemed that land will be converted. Already 83,000 plus cases are pending in the court of law violating the rules of 79(a) and(b). These cases will be dismissed with this amendment.

Let's look at some of the assumptions of the government. During Covid-19 the state suffered with lack of food for distribution due to shortage of food processing units. There are agricultural graduates and youngsters who are interested in agriculture. But they could not pursue this because they could not buy land. This decision of the government will benefit some 4000 thousand students who graduate every year from the state's agricultural universities. We can not give jobs to them and bring modern technology to agriculture. This decision of the government will bring in investment and end litigations. It is said that existing provisions worked against the interest of the public. (Who is this public?)

All these amendments will be promulgated as an ordinance and a bill will be introduced in the next legislature session. All these are preparation for the Global Investors meet in Bangalore. The process and the clearance will be done online/digital through land audit committee, State high level committee chaired by the chief minister or the state single window clearance committee.

People's organizations and movements such as farmers, women, Dalits have joined hands together demanding the government of Karnataka to withdraw the proposed amendment to the Land Reform Policy of 1961. The campaign has formulated a slogan in Kannada- " Namooru boomi namagirali, anyarigalla", (which translates to Let the land of our village be ours) under which banner the entire people of Karnataka united in

meaningful actions such as postcard campaign of writing postcards the Chief Minister of Karnataka, Poster campaign and Wall writing and Sticker campaign along with distribution of handbills/pamphlets to debate the issue at the people's level.

Through Adijan Panchayat we are reaching out to around 5000 families to create awareness on the land reforms through the above-mentioned campaigns.

This land Reform policy will affect the entire farming community in Karnataka. This will force the small farmers to sell their land. It would favour the national and global corporations. Instead of strengthening the hands of the farmers especially the small and marginalised farmers the government's drastic policy change is in the opposite direction. This will lead to widening of the existing gaps between the haves and the have not. The small and marginal landowners will ultimately be reduced to labourers in their own land.

No doubt, that most of the 4000 graduates who are coming out of agricultural universities every year in Karnataka will become the handmaids and servants of multinational companies promoting chemical farming and mono-cropping leading to degradation of land and landed resources in the name of progress, development and providing employment to the jobless.

Government's noble responsibility is to ensure and enhance the sustainability of life and livelihood sources of the poor and the marginalised. The present decision of the government will push the people further to the periphery of the periphery of development. They are already pushed away from the centre of development to the periphery. Constantly pushed to the receiving end and all the time waiting for government schemes to sustain their lives. The true sustainable development of people in the rural context is to sustain land, and land-related resources in the hands of the rural population. This is not the time to amend Land Reform Act. Actually, the land rights movements in Karnataka demanded that a task force be formed to relook at the Land Reform Act from the eyes of the poor, Dalit, women, landless farmers, marginal landowners and other marginalised communities and come out with tangible reforms in favour of them. Also place the land ownership in the hands of women, promoting ecological and collective farming in the model of Kutumbha shree

promoted by the government of Kerala. Agriculture with ecological farming is our future and governments cannot deny this fact.

It is the farmers and women farmers who are going to save the country. All that they need is a piece of land and support system from the government to produce for the needs of the country. They have the needed knowledge and wisdom to do so. For farmers agriculture is not a business, market and profit but life, livelihood and sustenance of all life on earth. It is building security and enjoying the dignity of life.

In fact, every village should become self-sustaining and self-reliant. A life with biodiversity is the need of the hour. Governments need to prioritize its development agenda. Poor centric, nature-centric, women-centric, and biocentric model of development is needed the most. To eradicate poverty, malnutrition and unemployment especially in the 7 lakh plus villages in India, we do not need experts, but ordinary women and men farmers in the villages are enough. The only requirement is the committed will of the elected representatives in the governance. The political leaders in the governance lack that analysis and paradigm shift in the process of so-called development.

### Challenges and difficulties faced

Usually we speak very little about our difficulties and focus on sharing our success stories. However, let me share a few things to tell you that it was not bed of roses. It was not that easy to achieve what we have achieved. We have suffered the hight of humiliation and pushed to the level of ending our lives. The psychological trauma our children went through and going through even today is not a joke. We have paid and paying heavy price in our personal lives. We have faced enough of life threats and kidnap threats. Yes like any other normal parents we were also scared and helpless but stood the test of time. But the impact on our lives and the children cannot be measured. There was a movement in our life that our integrity was questioned and doubted. Even some of our close friends took a distance from us. Oh that was painful. There was a moment in life that we stood alone except our people. Faced many losses but gained dignity for our people. The love of our people kept us going. The interior rock of strength in the core of our being was too strong that pushed us to move forward.

Allegation that one day we shall convert Dalits to Christianity, regional parochialism, linguistic hatred, caste prejudices, political (mis)calculations have all had their role in decision making about us. We have taken some initiatives on behalf of our people like reviving Dalit Spirituality, Dalit Panchayat Movement, Booshakthi Kendra etc. for which we have paid heavy price. We are clear that this direction of our work has emerged from the people and not a figment of imagination of any one individual. But we were misunderstood very badly. Even some friends from outside Tumkur said that Raj and Jyothi are two mad people.

At the level of the traditional leadership, there are two problems that we need to look into. Problem number one is the issue of co-option. In a Dalit Panchayat we cannot afford to have a leadership that is co-opted by the caste and political forces of the village. Therefore it is necessary to look into the compulsions under which cooption takes place and the community must make an attempt to liberate the leadership from the clutches of the caste forces.

Problem number two is the question of capacity to face the emerging challenges of the community. Times have changed and are changing. New challenges are emerging. We cannot afford to be archaic in outlook. The leadership will have to prepare the community to face the challenges of life collectively.

The emergence of a new brand of leaders from the community of Dalits will have to keep its focus on the people and keep on adding to the strength of the community rather than to the mainstream political party. During elections the external forces do disturb the peace, harmony and integration of the community.

When DPs were started there was an impression created about us was that we function in isolation and some of our strategies were interpreted badly as leading to a separation of Dalits from the mainstream. First of all we do not believe in any separatist theory for the Dalit people. However, we have been strong in our assertion of specificity. We do believe that we Dalits are different. Differences do not and should not form the foundation for inequality.

Specificity we must say that we, as Dalits want to be integrated into the mainstream society and governance with dignity and equality. This is our



valid claim and demand. Our clear assertion is that we do not want to be separated. However, the type of enslaved integration that is in practice in India now is not acceptable to us. When we say we want equality and dignity they say that we are disturbing the peace of the village. All such disturbances have led to a recognition of the dignity of the Dalit people in the district of Tumkur. Our demands are just constitutional and nothing more. This is the type of social change and development that we have brought about and we shall continue to do so.

### **How much is the support and space for women to emerge as leaders within the Dalit Movement?**

We must acknowledge the fact that whatever has been achieved in terms of Dalit empowerment it is because of Dalit movements in the country. Today there is a visible Dalit intelligentsia in India, Dalit Movements are gaining political power, playing a major role in national and international advocacy and lobbying for Dalit cause. While we are proud of our achievements we can not hide a deep longing in us that much more could have been achieved internally by taking our women along the journey of development.

First of all the perception about Dalit women within the Dalit Movement is the question to be addressed. If the Dalit Movements consider Dalit women as an asset to the movement then it should have been reflected in the leadership position of Dalit women in the movement. From my experience the innate perception of Dalit women is one of victimhood. There needs to be a radical transformation in the mindset of both the Dalit Movement and the Women's Movement in India. It is time for the Dalit Movements to radically change its perception about Dalit women to build a healthy future for the generation to come. Accept the women centric spirituality as a way of life in personal, community and in the movements. Each human being lives in the body of women before seeing the light of the world is a fundamental law of the cosmos. It is the energy of the mother that preserves the life of the baby. It is the woman who is the sustaining power of the human race. (Without excluding men) She is the dynamic source of energy that not only gives life but also preserves and enhances life. Governance is what comes naturally to women. This is what men in general and Dalit movements in particular need to acknowledge and accept. This world has no hope of restoring normalcy unless the

governance of communities and nations is handed over to women who are naturally equipped with capacity to govern with equity. (With exception) In the history of the world the first major violation was the shift to patriarchy as a governing principle of nations and communities. It is a severe intrusion into the cosmic order. Therefore, restoring comic order, means the restoration of the primacy of Dalit women in governance is the first and foremost duty of the Dalit movement in India.

Dalit leadership within the Dalit Movement itself is going through a sea of changes. What it is today is not the same 20 years back. There is visibility for the Dalit movements in the country. Of course the movements are struggling with internal ideological conflicts, emergence of fractions, new leadership assertions etc and addressing Dalit women leadership question is not the priority. Also the Dalit movements need a certain amount of understanding of the history of the oppressed as a prerequisite to understand the Dalit women leadership in the movement. Once again the best example is South Africa. We must listen or read Bishop Desmond Tutu's statement about the black women and their role in the liberation of South Africa. In the World Court of Women(2001) in Cape Town he openly acknowledged the leadership role played by black women. He was proud of his mothers, sisters and daughters of South Africa. That should be the spirit of Dalit Movements in India.

Providing space to women is not an easy task. It needs a very special courage to do it. It is a value and a spirituality from Adijan point of view. As long as our bodies are filled with dominant thinking and feelings, we cannot provide that inclusive space for women. Unless and until one is ready to empty himself or herself from the dominant values for which all of us have become slaves, one can not share that desired space with other. It is important that we analyse, accept and acknowledge this hard truth about ourselves. Often the movement leaders operate from certain amount of insecurities that pushes us to hold on to power and positions. According to me the present image of Dalit movement is not the Adi-image, the original image. Not guided by our ancestors with Adijan spirituality which believes in the primacy of women. It is beyond providing space for women's leadership in the movements. It is placing Dalit women in the governance of the community and the movements. It is a very big challenge before us.

It is time that the Dalit Movements look at the situation of Dalit women leaders in the country. They have to battle against a horribly caste-ridden society. They have to fight patriarchy within and outside. On behalf of their people and community they have to fight poverty. They have to put up a strong battle against dominant caste women in the name of religious practices. They have to fight against who represent domination. At present there are women who have battled against all odds to come to where they are today. A big salute to them and to all men leaders who are in solidarity with the Dalit women.

Why it is important to have Dalit women in the movements? The Dalit women have not only survived the terrible oppressive systems and structures but also have given life and form to the rest of the society is an unequalled body of knowledge and wisdom. The resilience with which the Dalit women have sustained and conducted their life itself is a deep source of inspiration. The spirit of tolerance, forbearance and inclusiveness that the Dalit women have maintained can become almost an eternal source of life. The Dalit movements must emerge from the wisdom of the Dalit women.

Sorry to say that the Dalit movements have generally failed to let its women take up frontline leadership positions. It is a strong indication that the Dalit movement is far removed from the spirituality of the community. If the Dalit movement was deeply rooted in the community and the people owned the leadership there would have been many Dalit women leaders in the movement. One of the strongest indicators for the organic development of Dalit movement will be the number of women taking up leadership positions. Let's hope for the best at least in the near future.



# PROF K. S. CHALAM

Chairman, Institute for Economic and Social Justice,

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*All the victims of the global order whether capitalist or Socialist  
should join hand and get united*

Prof. Dr. K. S. Chalam, Ex-In charge Chairman, U.P.S.C, a Constitutional position (equivalent to Supreme Court Judge) during 2005-2011, is a well-known Political Economist, Educationist and a Scholar of Dravidian Studies. Prof K. S. Chalam is known throughout the country as the facilitator of Academic Staff College concept and was likewise recognised for his Studies on Higher Education, Political Economy of Development. At UPSC, he was in-charge of several states like U.P, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, J&K etc for conferring of IAS, IPS, and IFS and had processed around 1000 disciplinary cases of All India service officers. He was the first Director of Swamy Ramanand Tirtha Rural Institute (SRTRI), Bhodan Pochampally funded by NCRI, Government of India and produced the plan of action for the institute during 1997-98. He was Member, NCRI during 2006-10. He is actively pursuing academic work after retirement from UPSC and helped NHRC to produce study reports on important national issues including MDM, NMHS etc. His book on “Governance in South Asia: State of the Civil Services” by Sage, is commended as a valuable contribution to promote excellence in the system. His latest book on Social Economy of Development in India, published by Sage 2017 has received critical acclaim. He is founder Editor of ‘South India Journal of Social Sciences’ (Estd 2002). He regularly contributes to University News, on invitation from AIU columnist for Visalandhra, Andhra Jyothi, Leader etc Telugu dailies .

After he became a lecturer, reader and professor of Economics in Andhra University, he continued his pursuit of studies on underdevelopment and discrimination against the region. Interestingly this is the region during the British regime (as part of Madras presidency) had recalcitrant movements including Alluri and later Srikakulam struggle. But none of the experts looked at the root cause of the discontent. As a native of the region born in Pathapatnam in the district of Visakhapatnam in 1948 (later Srikakulam was created in 1950) he knew the kind of discrimination the people of the region faced. He started a study group Uttarandhra Adhyana Vedika and involved leaders of the region like late Gouthu Latchanna, late Dronamraju, D.V Subbarao etc and published papers and books both in Telugu and English. His efforts were recognised and leaders of the region including the chief ministers and the B. N. Srikrishnan Commission on the bifurcation of the state in 2014 cited that Uttarandhra is backward and is separate from that of other coastal districts of Andhra. It is his sole contribution in getting popular recognition for the region as underdeveloped and neglected though it has all the resources. He is now Chairman, Institute for Economic and Social Justice, Visakhapatnam of the Pancha Shila Foundation Trust, Hyderabad.

What are your first impressions related to the current crisis that has emerged in the world due to Covid 19 pandemic. The Western World blame China while many other suspect global capitalist forces including China itself. What has been your assessment of it?

I enclose my papers published on this problem for your reference. I consider that this pandemic is a consequence of economic globalization that has engulfed the globe including China. This economic pandemic is due to the free trade, The WorldBank funded huge projects that devastated environment and livelihoods of indigenous people like native Indians, Dalits in India. The philosophy of globalization made people to move across countries as the theory of free trade or neoliberal policies did not consider human beings as such but only as suppliers of labor to move the machines to generate output for sale. In India, the Loksabha secretariat has published a note in 2013 indicating that development projects during the post-independence period have displace 50 million people, 40 per cent Dalits, 40 per cent Adivasis and the rest others. So this case study of India

is proof of what might have happened in other parts of the World mostly the vulnerable nations and groups.

In terms of fatalities, the most powerful nation of the world has the biggest followed by other powerful countries? So US, UK, Italy, Spain, France have the highest casualties while Africa as well as Asia remain relatively silent. What is the reason for the same.

You have raised the pertinent question. The present humans have a history of civilization of about 10000 years. We have been informed that there were tyrants, but were controlling a small part of the globe, be it Alexander, Genghis Khan, Asoka and or others. But they never shun their responsibility to provide minimum guarantees like food, health, skills ( not necessarily in present form of education). They never considered education and health as private goods. But the theories of neo-liberals supported by World Bank funded experts have gone too far to justify inequality in the name of merit and freedom. Some of their theories including the Washington Consensus are responsible for the present global spread of migrant workers across globe. They have carried either as asymptomatic or real carriers of Covid-19. Capitalist globalization wanted a minimalist state and services like health care and education as private goods for sale. Now you know that data (any information) is commodity for sale. Therefore public health care is destroyed in several countries in the name of privatization. Health care or Medicare that is passed on to Pharma, Insurance , Corporate hospitals lobbies. You can see the huge public budget on health care even in USA and other OECD countries that you have noted above, but no health facility for the people to access at the ground level (except nursing homes and few corporate hospitals for those who can afford as a commodity.) It is pity that during covid-19 makeshift arrangements are seen arranged in USA while thousands were dying, majority of them were blacks ( 35%). The third world countries mostly in the south pole have been using traditional methods of health care with little investment on protected water and the rugged methods of living etc vaccines for TB, BCG etc ; must have provided immunity, is to be confirmed by health experts

Where do you find India in this ? We did not have it in the beginning but despite nearly 70 days brutal lockdown, the number of Covid

suspect is actually increasing at alarming rate. Has the lockdown failed in India ? Government says that if a lockdown were not there then we would have seen massive fatalities particularly the older people. What is your opinion?

India being in the neighbourhood of China, the epicenter of covid-19 seems to have joined the club through NRI immigrants from other nations who have arrived in lakhs during February, March months from USA, Saudi etc. It is also accused that Trump program in Ahmedabad with huge marketing exercise has also contributed along with the Delhi based Nizamuddin event etc. There were terrible social media propaganda by some idiots have now being silenced when Maharashtra and Gujarat topped the list. Interestingly Kerala was the first state to report the incidence has never joined this group being one of the states with large Muslims in India. It has a very good health care system comparable to that of Cuba. The lockdown as of now appears doing well in containing its spread. But the agony of migrant labourers carrying it to other places will be known soon. The compensation package is accused as a Bania type policy of miserly spending on the migrants, (that will be costly in course of time) could have been avoided. The governments both union and states should have given compensation to MSME owners for loss of work and allow CSR funds to be spent on them to retain at their present places of residence, sounds rational. But it will not benefit the corporate companies. The demography of India is different from the West. We have a small proportion of elderly population in the age group 0f 60 plus with less than 10 percent of the total and a higher proportion of 15-35 age groups. This may be one of the reasons for low level of incidence along with other factors.

How do you look at the ‘migrant’ issue? The first thing pains me is how we have ‘converted’ our own people into ‘migrant’ and once you shame them in your daily narrative then you have actually killed their ‘confidence’ and ‘right’ as a citizen. I don’t know how this term came because most of the white collar people are not called ‘immigrants’ even in Europe and America. Are we staring at a much bigger explosion or what we can say inexplicable one in rural India? How do we meet this challenge?



This is a serious question. It needs some understanding of Social Economy of India. My book 'Social Economy of Development in India', by Sage 2017 is perhaps the first title in India looks at some of the issues. The history of migration has a religious connotation. Since the Aryans or aliens came from landlocked region of Bactria, they have forbidden their folks to cross sapta samudra, seven seas for fear of perhaps losing their identity. All the Dwijas have sincerely followed it. We know the story of Gandhiji going abroad by ship was declared some kind of an outcaste. But, the intelligent Brahmins as noted by Phuley have used modern British secular education and started entering into all professions including education, bar at law etc, from London. That was one of the reasons in the South, Non-Brahmins were asking for representation for other castes in secular government jobs and the justice party passed an act in 1925-26.. The internal reforms among the Brahmins made them more mobile and by the time Y2K came in Brahmin Entrepreneurs like Infosys started body shopping to send dwijas abroad. Interestingly, there is a trend in outmigration; only English educated dwijas go to USA and Europe while artisan castes from OBC, Dalit background with traditional skills go to Saudi Arabia etc. In fact, the remittances from GCC (Muslim) countries are higher than the West, yet the fascination is there only for USA like cricket. There are also studies and narratives that Dalits (like fisher folk, informal labourers) from the very beginning moved out to other neighbouring countries mostly from East India, Bay of Bengal region to East Asia not only in search of employment but also to earn and accumulate. We need more studies on this as mainstream scholarship has never shed light on this, except recently one Dalit scholar made an excellent study of how Dalits from Kerala were sold like slaves. After neo liberal policies were introduced, investments started coming to India but were concentrated in 5 cities, Delhi, Mumbai, Banglore, Chennai and Hyderabad. It means it has been a Gujarat or West centric (most of the Gujarat financiers live in Mumbai as it was their capital before 1960). Thus more number of jobs and opportunities are created in these urban areas with assured income and somewhat better living conditions. Therefore labourers started migrating from rural areas to urban centers. As 90 per cent of our work force including in the Agriculture sector are employed informally without a letter of employment are called informal laborers. Some of them seasonally migrate as workers as we see them during sowing and harvesting period in several parts of India, Punjab, Haryana, Andhra

etc to supplement their incomes for off season. You don't find such conditions in many parts of the world. The migrant laborers take their women folk to cities as they have opportunities to serve as domestic help to relieve the upper caste ladies to earn in organized sectors. The public sector used to provide some security and access to Dalits during the Nehru-Indira industrialization. Narasimharao has demolished it. New economic policy has helped the Dwija castes emerging once again as crony capitalists and Dalits have lost the opportunity to become industrialists through public sector and reservation opportunities. Some of those who entered jobs have remained only as job holders and without accumulation of capital shall remain dependent on multi-caste corporations. The total asset value of all the Dalits in the country is just equivalent to one day Ambani transactions on the share market. Now some friends are trying to rope in Dalit entrepreneurs may succeed to a limited extent in sectors like the blacks in USA capturing (or pushing them into) menial service sectors. In other words, modern economic development project in India is replicating the Varna system where all property will be held by the dwijas and rest of the community like Dalits, artisans the shudralog serve the bhadrak. Yes, calling our own citizens as migrant is really painful. But, the neoliberal economic opportunities do not allow opportunities to equitably distribute among regions and castes.

**You have called for 'oppressed of the world get united'. What exactly is the idea? How will the diverse communities oppressed get united?**

I have been trying to identify the marginalized groups in India along with Dalits. There is always a misnomer that lower castes means Dalits (may not fit in one nomenclature). But the fact of the matter is that there are several castes among OBCs who are listed as SC in some states and OBCs in others. The point is that along with Dalits we need to take into consideration other communities like the Azral Muslims (mostly converts from Dalits), artisans like weavers, carpenters etc, the traditional castes who have lost their jobs and displaced with modernization and liberalization. They are the victims of the system. Interestingly none of the ethnic groups or indigenous people in North America, parts of Africa, Asia are either considered as workers in the modern sense of the term or brought in to the narrative of mainstream struggles for remunerative wages, liberation etc because they are far removed from the mainstream.

Except pockets of East India, Adivasis amounting to 100 million in India are not part of the mainstream, except continuing their age old armed struggles for liberation in some pockets. That is also gone now. There are 370 million indigenous people in the World who are never part of development projects; in fact, they are victims of displacement. Dalits in India as noted above are the traditional victims of the system are about 300 million in South Asia. All these groups are now seen on the streets and on roads and are being killed on the way to reach the destination. All of them are Victims of the World systems, either capitalist or socialist. They should come together to change the focus of the international organizations like USA and the civil society agenda.

Coming back to unity question, back home in India we have been listening activists, academics about 'unity' of Bahujan Samaj. As a person deeply involved in theorizing the Bahujan issues how do we break the 'graded inequality' as Baba Saheb used the term for our hierarchical society. How do you bring Dalits-Backward communities-Adivasis together? What about inclusion of minorities too? How feasible is this idea? I mean can there be a unity without discussing deeply as what are the points of diversions and disagreements?

The Dalit –bahujan- minority unity is a dream of several anti- caste crusaders may be from the time of Lord Buddha. I consider Buddhism is not just a way of living or faith; it was a movement to bring all the marginalized and persecuted majority population by the tiny minority through deceit and myths on one platform. His social background seemed to have helped. Siddhartha Gautama deconstructed the myths and gave his interpretations. That is why the philosophy was brutally exterminated. Archaeologists like Giovanni Virardi have collected new evidences to show how it was crushed in the symbolic form of keeping Buddha image under the feet of Durga etc ( not chandi or rajaki etc). It seems there were very few attempts to interpret Buddhist theology from this perspective. But those who have embraced Buddhism have done it for several reasons and among them few wish to avoid social exclusion (like the South Dalit Christians). It means that the yearning to bring Dalit, Adivasi, OBC and minority unity has been there for a longtime and suddenly bloomed during the Anti-Mandal movement. If one examines this movement and how it has been petered out, you will realize the weaknesses of this phenomenon

and the cunning and continuous onslaught of Brahmanism against this unity proposal from different platforms. Some people do not understand this and say, forget about those poor Brahmins and they are no more powerful. I am personally not against any Brahmin who considers himself /herself as human like any other. But most of them behave like Brahmin, born with virtues and merit. That is why a new maxim, Be Human not Brahmin, came up. People generally look at the dress code of a priest that appears so demeaning and come to the conclusions like the above. I may provide here a counter picture of a well-dressed Gate Keeper (dress code) standing before a Star hotel, he is invariably drawn from one of the low castes but will never be allowed inside, while the Brahmin with robes taken inside with folded hands. But this is only one part of it. In fact some of the priests, I call them temple workers, do not participate in policy making. But the secular, modern, cunning and brainy *chanakyas* who are spread from the World Bank to Secretariats of all kinds are at work 24/7 to maintain the hegemony. It is they who are to a large extent responsible for the disunity among the foolish bahujans some of them believe them. I can give you one episode in A.P. I was closely following Kanshiram in AP. It was almost certain that BSP would make a surprise in the South with huge unprecedented mobilisation of SC, ST, OBCs for electoral politics during 1993-4. NTR had sent emissaries for alliances. It was exactly at this time, the Brahmin brain envisioned that if BSP comes to power in AP, it would be second coming of Non-Brahmin movement; it would finish all political manoeuvrings including left groups. They knew how the South was different from the North in this consciousness. It is alleged that intelligent, secular and progressive Brahmins caught hold of '*chamchas*' in the BSP and created dissensions, of course with internal weaknesses of BSP. Of course, you cannot always accuse the other, when you have your own weaknesses accumulated over a period of time such as exclusionary projects of reservation in jobs for those who are educated, against the 95 per cent illiterate Dalits who need work both in the organized and unorganized sectors. Till very recently there were no demands or struggles for these real victims of the system except untouchability issues. Of course the socially conscious tiny section among the Dalit and in some OBC groups have raised the social consciousness of the bahujans. But, it has never been crossed. One important development in the Post-Kanshiram Dalit-bahujan movement, critiques say, is explosion of Dalit (to some extent

OBC) bahunan petty leadership at every place from village to district, state and all India level, each giving the same slogan. The electoral machine of the upper castes more than the Dalits understood the phenomenon and started converting them as agents of party politics particularly during elections. They act as conveners of party and carry the cash for distribution among the Dalit, OBC groups. This seems to have been a career for some and for others the distribution of welfare schemes, someone told me, untouchability litigations, Ambedkar associations really made them busy. The real problem is many of them are motivated due to injustice, but they are not properly guided nor some of them amenable to any discipline. We cannot compare the employees' organizations as the real Dalit movement (some may) as their agenda limited. Some in the Telugu states may be in other parts of the country having become evangelists with a received agenda through NGO networks. The leaders are enlightened people may not join the larger congregations of the caste, but their first loyalty is god or agents of that god. The followers are dumb lambs. If we keep on narrating the practical problems, you will be bemused that we have so many issues to be undertaken. But someone suggested that, it is better to concentrate on a new generation of Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs who agree with the agenda, in the age group of 20-40. Educate, organize and enthuse them to work with people through an orchestrated ideological base. You may succeed.

You coined a term 'Bahujan Hindus' and said that they must speak up now but this term look unacceptable to many intellectuals as they claim that backward communities and Dalits are not really Hindus. How do you explain this?

I know that the problem arises because of our education and ideological make up. This is not my innovation, it has already been there. Yes I know that Ayothidas first called the Dalits as Buddhists. That is the reason Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs are not part of Brahminical Hindus. They are different. Who were they before Buddhism? Did they migrate with the Aryans? They are original people from the time of Harappa, almost 1000 years before Lord Buddha. Some of the Dalit intellectuals don't read and reflect on historical data and question the established constructs made with the help of writings of some British and Brahminical scholars. As a social scientist my job is to question the unexplored and unknown phenomenon depicted

as known and popularized as accepted theory. I give an example of great critiques like Wendy Deniger, she is a great scholar. Do you find any references to the subaltern or lower caste religious practices in her writings? She mentions about Dalits, Ambedkar and Hindu persecution, but not the deep metaphysical or empirical episteme generated by the natives. How could a large community survive hundreds of years without their own knowledge and survival skills? I have tried to address this problem by bringing the idea that Bahujan (to include all native Indians) belief systems and Brahminical beliefs are parallel. I gave examples of how each goddess, goblin, Ayurveda and other practices are appropriated by Brahminical cooption technique and improved upon it. Yet the original knowledge and practices are still remained there with them. Many castes among SC, OBC even today carry them as beggars as bajigar, dasari, pambala etc castes. The kind of anthropology and materialist interpretations conducted by scholars like D. D. Kosambi and few others have strengthened the myths and did not give space for Dalits. D.P Chattopadhyay, Rahul Sankrutyayan etc have tried to bring out the original contributions of Dalits, Adivasis. After all those who are the original people of Sindh River and below should be called Sindhus or Hindus. How can an alien who migrated from central Asia, Bactria be given the ownership of the Country beyond Sindhu calling the Dwijas as Hindu? The term Bahujan Hindu contains in it Buddhist practices as part of it because Buddha is not an alien. I have published a book in Telugu where some of these questions are addressed.

What will our life in the aftermath of Covid 19? Will the new normal take away our 'liberties' ? Will the government focus on the historical issues which remain unresolved so far or will it use this calamity to become more authoritarian?

My monograph on "Victims of the World Unite -Against all Pandemics" is ready. I have noted that this health pandemic is part of economic pandemic in the form of globalization. It became pandemic due to migrations and movement of resources without restrictions. The idea that there are no limits to growth since perfect substitution among factors is possible led to the destruction of environment. There are 26 people in the World controlling half of the wealth of the globe might declare that they are super humans and the paid intellectuals generate theories and policies

in praise of them. It is the self-seeking intellectuals who generate ideas and false knowledge without any accountability, is responsible for the present crisis along with huge accumulation of wealth. Now Covid-19 is being used as an alibi to abrogate temporarily civil rights and allow all economic activities to help corporates to make money. It is an undeclared emergency. Some of the ruling elite might become authoritarian, as reported from Central America and Trump's characteristic stance as tyrant led him to escape to the underground. Americans have shown the way to demonstrate democratic protest to make the rulers realize that after all Covid-19 is a human problem to be tackled as leader of the human beings. Rulers are not Pasupathis? In fact Indian Pasupathi was much more benevolent than the inhuman beings that are regulated by corporates?

World-over democratic regimes are becoming more powerful and enjoying 'popularity'. Is this being deliberately created? What do you think about the Indian responses? How has opposition responded to it?

Democracy is understood as one man one vote and rule of law with freedoms and rights guaranteed is not in place today. It is a textbook definition has undergone several changes with the emergence of market as a dominant institution. I don't know how many scholars have examined the difference between democracy and market, the one is based on aggregates ie societal goals while the latter talks of individual and self-interest. They are incompatible. Yet there are hundreds of studies to show the merit of market in protecting democracy and freedom. Perhaps they were interested in the freedom of the consumer to choose and not the human rights. Scholars like Bowels long ago brought out the contradictions in capitalist democracies like the USA. Now the market i.e. capitalist, particularly the corporate capitalism has overtaken the so called democratically elected governments. Don't forget that we have today market based democracies like USA, India and several other countries where a political brand is created and votes are sought or bought at the time of voting. The money that is spent on electioneering is recovered through policies that are beneficial to the corporate investor. All your freedoms that we say bla bla are of no use. You are now witnessing what is happening in the USA after George Floyd murder. Much more serious things are happening in India, yet the courts of justice supposed to protect the rights and freedoms of people look to the government for directions.

It is undeclared emergency that suspended rights and freedoms but allowed only economic activities to continue. Indeed a very 'intelligent' move.

**Are you satisfied with the Bahujan responses on the Covid issue particularly related to political parties headed by the Bahujan leaders?**

The Bahujan Samaj Party has unfortunately remained as an exclusive group without much camaraderie with other likeminded parties, maybe for their own reasons, I don't want get deep in to it. The bahujan leadership is in quandary, I think because many of them including well-read people never thought that the liberation of the Dalit particularly in economic, social and political aspects of life is intimately connected with others. They still think the days of Babasaheb arguing for special rights as an exclusive group under the British raj, still exists. There are no middlemen like the British to play the role of arbiter now. We have brutal casteist governments in power for several years suppressing the Dalit upsurge or emergence of Bahujan rule. They do not allow you to emerge as a powerful force to occupy power, privileges and economic opportunities. However, they can make someone like xyz from the Bahujan group including Dalits to occupy seats under their supervision to implement their agenda. Dalit activists as such have never undertaken issues like problems of Informal labour, payment of wages, exploitation, lack of economic opportunities etc as points of agenda of Dalit activity. Of course there are some groups may be individuals like you and me talking about these issues, have never reached the masses. Therefore when 47 million are on the roads, 80 per cent are Dalits, the activists did not understand the phenomenon. They have come to know of it when the government learning that they are all low caste people, paid little attention, then Dalits realized the problem. Now some Dalit groups are thinking at least on the Whatsup. The poor have remained poor with no access to leadership or resources. Trump has at least transferred some dollars to the accounts of the blacks, Hispanics and others while Modiji gave packages for business only. It is Varnashrama dharma reinforced as Rajdharm. You know what is dharma now, dwijas as twice born should get all the privileges and the rest of shudras including Dalits should serve them.



It seems that the government of India considers this opportunity to go for rabid privatization. Government wants to escalate the privatization process and inviting the foreign investment. Look how they are failing railways. Despite all efforts, people are being charged for Covid testing. Advisors are suggesting that we must not ignore private health services. This was an opportunity for the government to strengthen the public sector but they are doing exactly the opposite. Even the opposition ruled government is doing the same. What is your opinion to this .

I think this is not a sudden outcome. It has been there in our system for a long time except for a brief period during Nehru. (see my 'Economic Reforms and Social Exclusion', Sage 2011, trs in to Hindi by Sage). Now the strong and open Brahminical Hindutva government definitely takes the opportunity to privatize everything to restrict access to resources for Dalits, Azral Muslims and lower BCs and restore the old caste order. If the dharma is not followed, Vishnu ( symbol of Vedic Aryans) will emerge and restore dharma. Why should they take risk? The agenda is clear with the help of their long lost genetic brother, may be distantly related to Hitler, Trump. The economy, resources and the country will be kept at the feet of the Caucasians, Anglo-Saxon and Bania Brahmin combine to reap the returns. They always think of caste benefit while talking about Cost Benefit analysis. There is no secreting in this as their ideologues have been telling this for a longtime and now openly declare that the time has arrived in the form of Covid-19. The Brahmin secularists and some left comrades are always there to make this a superstructure affair to be ignored. The Rs 20 lakh crore package and the earlier demonetization, swapping NPAs etc. go to them only. The only issue is that how the North Indian Bania Brahmin group is tolerating this open spillage towards Gujarat?

You are an Ambedkarite who has written extensively on economic issues with human rights perspective too, which is actually rare. People don't want to get into constructive discussions and debates but more on populism. Have you been satisfied with Bahujan responses on the current crisis?

I think this is part of the earlier question and I have given my opinion there. I wish to add here that the Dalit- Bahujan or scheduled caste intellectuals segment has just taken the shape of a bud and it will take some

more time to blossom. But attempts have already been made to nip it in the bud.

With continuous assault on public sector and welfare model, the government has actually attacked the reservation system but very unfortunately we do not see a concerted effort by our political parties and intellectuals to speak up against 'economic liberalisation' which in my opinion is nothing but handing over our national resources to cronies.

Yes. I have published in Telugu about a decade ago on the caste based crony capitalism that began with East India Company. P.V Narasimharao was a visionary and we will never know what happened to Babri Masjid demolition and likewise we will not be able to decipher the code of New Economic Policy of 1991. Even Dr. Manmohan Singh may not aware of the code and continued the policy under UPAI and II. It seems the NDA has cracked the code with the help of Brahmin bureaucrats, former and present to take it to the logical end. There is no secrete in it now after capturing all important wings of state and particularly the so called fourth estate making it as a pet dog to repeat the mantras interpreting the NDA activities as Upanishads, illuminating the Veda. Who is bothered if public sector is privatized? I have been telling that the investments made on the public sector were the sweat and blood of the Dalit and poor who have suffered illiteracy, ill health and death and saved public money for the public sector that belongs to them.

You have served the country in various capacities right from teaching in the universities to being a member of the Union Public Service Commission. What have been your experiences there in terms of your 'presence'? An assertive Ambedkarite is not 'welcome' at many places particularly among the academics dominated by the diverse varieties of brahmanical elite.

Yes. This is purely a personal question which I would like to address later in a different form. I was one of the few, due to my early education, could climb up to the highest level with lot of struggle and help from well-wishers. I never had a godfather or god to rely upon. It was sheer chance of opportunity and taking up challenges like resigning jobs to take the stake

that came in my way helped me a lot. My experience with different assignments is not something to be emulated. But I have my imprint in every job that I have done including the last assignment at UPSC and NHRC. I think I have a different background being a born resident of Srikakulam, a Madhya Kalinga region with huge history of struggles had an indirect impact on me. I have been active in working with several progressive movements including literary organizations that embedded me with some emotional connect with everything that is progressive. I have faced terrible problems in my life mostly from within. But I could withstand all that as I was never fond of money and privileges. I used to raise issues relating to all reservation groups in my assignments with particular reference to Dalits. Fortunately, I have gathered support from other friendly secular individuals in moving such engagements, partly succeeded. I have faced subtle discrimination in office after colleagues learnt about my social background, otherwise people used to be cordial with me as a progressive thinking person.

**You have also worked with numerous human rights groups including Amnesty International. Can you share with us your experiences with these organizations? How have they taken the issues of Dalits ?**

As I noted earlier, I have been associated with all enlightened and progressive organizations in this part of the country from the very beginning of my life had facilitated me to join AI in the late 1970s. I became Secretary, Indian section AI and participated in international conferences relating to apartheid. My association with NCDHR and our representation to WCAR at Durban was very significant to understand the international importance of Dalit movement. In fact, Sri Digvijay Singh through his PA Dr. Amar Singh of Madhya Pradesh government invited me first to take up an assignment at Mhow which I gently declined. Later I was made Member, Planning Board and got associated with the Bhopal declaration along with several activist friends. I have recorded my impressions with some of these organizations and individuals in my writings. Some of the organizations have soft corner for Dalits and the political outfits consider them as a strong constituency in electoral politics. The role of the left and democratic intellectuals and their front organizations in shaping Dalits as leaders with empathy has not been displayed in clear terms, may be due to the confusion with the concept of

Class. I think very few of them have so far defined class in India and enumerated castes in each group of class. This may be one of the reasons that Dalits look at these parties with suspicion without an alternative.

**Did you ever face caste discrimination when you worked in the academia? If yes, how did you respond to that ?**

I have a different kind of experience. My father was a school teacher and therefore I was never put in a hostel. We have a different caste structure in Srikakulam where caste rigidities were small as it was half tribal area. At the college level I was a day scholar and during my University education, I got in to a part time job and remained outside the campus. But, during the PG, I was associated with friends like late B. J Augustine and his team that defeated Sri Venkaiah Naidu panel (who is now Vice-President of India) as President of Students Union. Later when I joined the faculty of Economics I was associated with the left, Rationalist and anti-caste movements that have a component of Dalit activism. Caste discrimination was dormant by the time we became important and have subtle discrimination even at the highest level of Constitutional authority, UPSC. I used to take up policy issues, not necessarily individual matters like promotion, transfer, posting etc of Dalits and took the support of others in getting them through and sometimes times I failed. I never publicized my achievements. My experience at Andhra University is different. We had the first Dalit Vice-chancellor of India Dr. L. Bullayya, when I was a student. He has introduced reservations in admissions and recruitment that brought a structural change in the campus. We used to have large chunk of Dalit , OBC group and equally strong Kamma Reddy groups on the campus. Dalit leadership has emerged to take up national assignments like G.M.C.Balayogi becoming the first Dalit speaker etc. I was a lecturer when he was a student and knew him so well. But over a period of time the militancy and Dalit drive seems to have undergone a change here. After we left the campus 15 years ago (like me several retired), I am told that things are not very conducive for Dalit upsurge like in many campuses today.

**What will be your advice to growing Ambedkarite fraternity in the academia as well as in the civil society and other social movements. How do they respond to gestures towards forming coalition with other**

likeminded groups. Should they form coalition or not and if yes, then who are the best to ally with.

Dalit students and scholars should understand now the context of education, training, research and extension or activism. There are awful developments in the academia now. We had a mixed bag in our times and had opportunities to interact with others and learn. There was acute competition both within and from outside to sparkle in academics through study and reflection. You know the conditions now on the campus. The conditions of central universities with all India representation and competition even for Dalits are different. The number is very small compared to the total higher education enrolment. Most of the state universities are dumping grounds for SC, ST, OBC groups and the upper castes presence is limited. We have around 7.5 lakh Indian students (mostly dwija) studying abroad. Therefore What I used to say is that the state is intelligently moving in providing free schooling (education) to bahujans and withdrew knowledge by dubious means in most of the universities. We have graduates from these centres of learning with very limited knowledge or salable skills. Naturally PGs, Ph.Ds from these communities end up in workforce as sales boys etc. In other words, is it not an intelligent move to get educated cheap labour in the new economy and imported experts (B and B) from abroad to manage these crowds? It is wonderful Varna scheme working very well. But without anticipating these developments, I have experimented with a concept of training university and college teachers in 1985 ( drafted a secular Dalit empathy syllabus) with UGC support that became Academic Staff College Scheme from 1987, and I was appointed as the first Director to head one such college at Andhra University (now the name is changed to HRD Centre). This is considered as the World's largest teacher training programme in higher education and my name is associated with it. A young Brahmin college teacher along with others, I am told were jealous about the success of our program has published an article, criticizing the program was vindicated by 2 or 3 Ph.D dissertations on the scheme and is still in operation.

We have recently had a massive Industrial mishap in Vishakhapattanam in which several people were killed and many other got seriously affected. We don't know what is the health implication of it as not much

is being heard from them. What was it and how is the state government dealing with it.

I regret very much to bring to the notice of the people of India that this is the first such mishap in India. It is not comparable to Bhopal. Bhopal gas tragedy was due to a different gas and the immediate loss of life was higher. The gas leakage has happened because of leaking vapour from the styrene monomer (SM) gas storage tank at LG Polymers, RR Venkatapuram Visakhapatnam at the early hours, around 3 am on 7 April 2020. 11 people were killed on the same day and 2 more died later this month and hundreds are in hospital. Thousands of residents were evacuated by the police. A Dalit IPS in the rank of DCP was the first to arrive at the site and started moving men and material risking their lives while Covid-19 lockdown was in operation. The long run impact of the gas is not known yet. I have reported the issue to NHRC. But by the time NGT took a suo motu cognizance and ordered compensation. There are several episodes about the leakage and the aftermath. There are different colonies nearby polymers including an SC, BC government colony. It is reported in the media that the long run impact of the gas is adversely affecting the patients who have inhaled the gas would be severe like cancer and other ailments. The role of the Centre and state governments is interesting that they have made the Korean company to shift the liquid from the site to Korea and the management is consulted, it is alleged in all these operations as some of the Indian (AP) partners of the company are politically connected. Interestingly, it is taken as an industrial accident, but it is an environmental disaster. The confusion among the officials, activists about the two terms itself shows our consciousness about our surroundings even at a time when we are locked down due to covid-19.

This accident reminded us the Bhopal gas tragedy where the government that time ensured free passage to the CEO of Union Carbide for the United States. People never got compensation and the company remained shamelessly unpunished. The big corporate lobby put a lot of pressure on the government. Though here the company LG is a South Korean entity but we don't know whether they are still being treated royally or have been taken to task.

The issue of Gas leakage is quite different here. The LG polymers were not the original company at the site. It was known as Hindustan Polymers located at that time by a different management, a little away from the city in the 1960s. Several organizations including the left wanted that it is to be shifted or closed as it is a chemical plant. Later LG Polymers had taken over the plant with the support of the then TDP government with land alienated from Simhachalam Endowment land at concessional rate for its expansion. During the last 25 years Visakhapatnam city has developed and realtors constructed some colonies around the factory . Therefore, the whole area is now in danger. The residents of the area who have vacated their homes after the leakage and accommodated elsewhere are now refusing to go back and occupy their homes as they have seen how animals including snakes, small creatures died after the gas leak in and around an area of 3 Kms. Interestingly, LG Polymers has filed a defamation case against AP Pollution control board and state and central governments, it seems for damages as they claim, their reputation is damaged with court litigations while they were attending to the legitimate demands of victims. It is trivial and the reactions from public and the state are not known yet due to lock down.

I think I should mention about the region since I happened to be the first person to raise the issue of underdevelopment of North Andhra or Kalingandhra with my publications since 1972 and more after 1990. People from other regions may not aware that 6 of the present Orissa districts including the infamous KBK, Koraput, Bolangir and Kalahandi were part of Visakhapatnam district of Madras presidency till 1936. It is this part of the country that fought against the aliens or Aryans as per religious text. No one therefore, took interest in the region at least from the time of Buddha. It is reported that Buddha's left canine tooth was brought to the headquarters of Kalinga which is named Dantapuri, an archeological site near Srikakulam. The same is recorded in Sri Lanka as the tooth relic is now in Anuradhapura. Dantapura is vandalized now, needs Buddhists attention. The region was rich in resources and hardworking and ignorant people are being slowly colonized and all polluting industries are dumped here. The biggest nuclear power station is being shifted from Gujarat to Kovvada near Srikakulam. My self along with late Prof Shivajirao educated the people three decades ago and now the people are fighting against it.

But money bags are on the move to suppress it. Therefore, you can understand the fragile and vulnerable nature of our region.

Amidst the Corona crisis, we are hearing that various state governments are starting land bank to hand them over to big companies. When a huge number of people are returning to the villages, is not it important for the government to go for a strong agrarian reform to democratize rural power structure. Do you think it is an opportunity for the government to for pro-people agenda? If yes, then what could that be ?

In fact the ideas relating to corporatization of agriculture began when Naidu was CM of AP and started an exercise known as Vision 2020 in which the World Bank experts mooted the idea. It is in this context one should understand the land tenure system in India and Andhra Pradesh. We have two different tenures during British, one was Ryotwari and the other was Zamindari. North Andhra including parts of Orissa was in Zamindari and Coastal Andhra was in Ryotwari. Therefore after independence Zamindari abolition Act was passed in 1948 and the government was supposed to take over the ownership of the lands. Interestingly, there was no systematic settlement of records as to who owned what land and the old zamindars with political clout still claims ownership of thousands of acres even after the abolition. We know how our Judiciary functions. The city of Visakhapatnam one of the most beautiful locations on the East coast comes under this category and the government lands are for grabbing. Several top industrialists including Adani have an eye on the East Coast as people here jocularly refer to East Coast as Adani coast and West coast as Ambani coast. Now you can understand the significance of land banks and the drama enacted by the corrupt bureaucrat- contractor-politician nexus.

What is the future of regional parties as well as federalism in India given the nature of a highly ‘nationalist’ government at the centre which believe in unilateralism and not really care for wider consultations?

I have just read in the Newspaper that someone ( we know who could be that) has filed a case to declare India as Bharat. What does it signify? It is clear that they wanted to establish a Hindu Rashtra with pious seers as advisers ( now in Telangana and Andhra like that of Karnataka, Brahminical swamys are consulted by the CMS for different reasons).



Therefore, federalism, the term Babasaheb has used as 'India as a union of states' is gone long back. When the GST Act was passed amending the constitution, particularly changing the important economic roles the states were given in the constitution, the states lost their status and made dependent upon the center/union. I think it is not a sudden outcome. It has been deliberated for a longtime and implemented to suit the arithmetic of Dwija group being small at local, but formidable at the centre. May be after the Covid-19 with the surplus money generated through packages, privatization etc moves, the centre might declare a unitary form of state and approved by the judiciary will come in to effect from 2024 or before?

Can you please reflect on 50 million people being displaced since independence. This is a huge number. Since 1990, after India opened up its economy, the number of people getting displaced has risen alarmingly. If the government's own committee's are saying this then this become more serious. There have been no lesson learnt on this and in fact the process of displacement in the name of development has increased further.

Yes, the number is arrived at by the Parliamentary secretariat while preparing a report on how many people were displaced by projects in the Independent India. In fact the UPA has brought the 2013 land acquisition act to overcome some of the adverse effects of land acquisitions for development projects. But it did not benefit the victims of development projects as the ruling classes and their collaborating executive are wicked in developing alternative ways of acquiring lands. For instance in Andhra Pradesh ChandraBabu Naidu found a term called 'land pooling' technique to acquire lands from farmers voluntarily by convincing that they (landowners) will be benefitted by development of Amaravati capital region. It is reported that around 35000 acres are officially acquired and around a lac acres unofficially grabbed by his cronies as alleged by his successor Jagan Mohan Reddy. Jagan and his coterie, it seems are not different and they are also acquiring lands through the same means may be in a different mold. In all these state sponsored activities Dalits and land less service castes are affected as they don't have titles of lands to claim compensation. The compensation packages of govt. and other benefits do not help them. In fact Dr Ambedkar was right when he wanted lands are to be nationalized even by giving sanads and bonds to the owners, precisely

to protect the landless poor. Now , NDA-III is much more serious in acquiring lands not only from agricultural fields but the coastal lands by amending CRZ rules. I fought for CRZ violations in Visakhapatnam region as the fisher folk here are the most vulnerable.

Shouldnt the government whether of past or present be held accountable for what I term as the 'annihilation of Dalit Adivasi' culture as they have been displaced from their traditional zones in the name of 'national interest' or business interests.

Covid-19, brought some crucial lessons for the mankind to learn. The enlightened and not the headhunters are so inhuman today that we have seen allegations against xenophobic rulers like Trump, Modi etc who knew that only certain social groups like the blacks in USA, Dalits in slums of India are more affected by covid -19 and being complacent that conveys a message, let the burden of the govt. be reduced by other means and help improve the wealth of the few for whom they are working.

World Over, indigenous people enjoy the lot of autonomy in their zones. International instruments categorically mention that any developmental project must follow ' Free Prior Informed Consent'. Unfortunate part is that India does not even accept the international definition of Indigenous people. It is not a signatory on UN Declaration on Indigenous people. Why shouldnt we as a nation accept that Adivasis are the first nation as Canada and many other countries suggest.

In fact we have observed in Durban conference that there are several indigenous people in the World who are now become Neo-untouchables as neither the capitalist nor the socialist systems bother about them. I have produced a monograph on “Victims of the World Unite-against exogenous pandemics” explaining that there are one billion indigenous people in the World who are helpless. In fact, late Prof Alesina of Harvard worked on this theme with a different objective, has noted how inequalities are widening between ethnic groups. India did not agree with the concept of indigenous people and therefore 30 crore or 300 million Dalit and Adivasis are not counted by some agencies, but they do come under the concept of Native Indians. Yes, there are some provisions like “Reservations” in the USA and other countries to protect the interests and habitats of the

indigenous people. But we know what is happening to Amazon forests, Eastern and Western Ghats in India. We have a problem with civil society activism in India as they are fragmented and sector based activists, ( even against the concept of civil society) with no comprehensive understanding of the problems of the victims while all political parties are not interested in issues of mass destruction that may not bring votes.

Forest Rights Act was considered to be a way forward to resolve the forest crisis though it was not really an Adivasi law. It actually make people depend on the forest bureaucracy. It is the forest department whether people should get land or not and they are not keen on people living in the forest. Same forest department does not mind having big resort on the prohibited areas and happy to organise Tiger Safaris for the rich. Then there is a corporate environmental lobby which feels Adivasis are a threat to forest. How do you look at the whole issue of Adivasis and their identity.

Forest Rights Act is again diluted. I used to entertain a cliquy idea that we don't need acts to help the victims as the Constitutional mandate is so vast that any thinking person can help the victims. But once the Act is passed, the first hurdle comes from the judiciary in finding technical holes and helps the corporate lobbies. We know how late Ajit Jogi as CM of Chhattisgarh fought against the Balco privatization and the apex court simply said that it is a policy matter doesn't interfere, and thereafter devastation became unbridled. They just forget about directive principles of state policy but, interfere even in the cases of fundamental rights of SC , ST reservations saying that they are not rights. Several critiques say it is a nexus of upper castes in all wings of government that is ruling the roost. It is strange that some activists do not know that we have 10 crore Adivasis in India who do not come under the category of class but still struggle for their existence. In fact religious fundamentalists of all categories have been trying to entice their support through religious activities that have destroyed their languages, culture etc. It has already succeeded in the North East and now 5th schedule areas are being targeted. Sadly, there is no leadership among the Adivasis except for political manoeuvring.

India brought Zamindari Abolition act immediately after independence but Zamindari never got abolished. Then it brought Ceiling Act to

control the new zamindars but powerful people got away with it as they cleverly circumvented the ceiling laws and placed such clauses that put ceiling outside certain things like Gaushalas i.e. cow-shelters, religious places, educational institutions, farmhouses. Today, we have ceiling laws but powerful people used these points to protect their lands.

It is very difficult to understand the process of change, economic and social in India if you do not have experience with the people at grass roots. The Zamindari abolition Act 1948 helped Zamindars to get compensation in cash and they got converted as capitalists. It is not the Marxian transformation of feudal lords converting as capitalists' through an internal process, but it is state sponsored conversion in India. Therefore, in several areas where Zamindari system prevailed, they got either in to Parliament or Industrial sector and became policymakers with the help of the acts of government. I think I have written somewhere how each plan, though aimed on some targets, actually released new forces in to the economy to become fully capitalist by 1991. Therefore Zamindari abolition remained a half won or partial success story. In fact people including some left parties forgot about the discussion on land reforms. Whatever little gains that the landless laborers got through land reforms in states like Andhra Pradesh is almost gone back with new economic policy where not hundreds but thousands, if not lakhs of acres are given to so called naya Zamindars like Ambani, Adani, Tata, GVK, GMR SEZ etc. It is time that all political parties should come together to demand either to continue land reforms or nationalize all lands.

India's religious places have huge land. Tirupathi, Jaggannath Puri, temples in Kerala and Tamilnadu, Mutths, churches, mosques have huge land. Do you think that religious places should be brought under Land Ceiling Laws as well as their incomes should be taxed. With huge size of money and gold, these religious places enjoy enormous political power and basically powerful people enjoy full patronage.

It is alleged by knowledgeable sources that Religion, irrespective of which religion, is being used to conceal incomes and assets. I don't know why the founding fathers have agreed to the Article 27 in the constitution that exempts payment of taxes from assets or income that is being used for promotion of religion. It is this single article with the support of all kinds

of functionaries, there is proliferation of religious trusts to preserve the so called black money here. Instead of depositing it in Swiss banks, now the money is kept in the trusts of swamis'. That is the reason why the arrogance and inhuman activities of some of these trusts, mutts etc are thrived in recent times. Some of them own TV channels media houses etc. This is the biggest source of power and proliferation of black money being touted in the name of bhakti. Just one per cent of the accumulations are enough to change the political fortunes, as they have men who are paid from this income, and material that is bought and shown as part of its activities. Now with the state directly supporting this illicit activity in the name of religion, what else can anyone do? It is all in the name of god.

Dalit Face a lot of discrimination during lockdown due to Corona Virus. In Andhra Pradesh, a Dalit doctor was humiliated by the police simply because he sought PPE and criticised the chief minister but he was suspended for that. It is surprising that the government did not feel any shame in insulting a doctor. What is more disturbing that we have not heard much protest by the 'progressive' or even the Dalit groups in Andhra Pradesh. What do you attribute to their silence ?

Yes, the Dalit doctor's case has attracted the attention of the media, but the protest meetings and statements given by some Dalit organizations here were blocked. Interestingly, there is again religious dimension to the problem. You know all the top Dalit leaders in AP are directly or indirectly linked to Christianity, they are converts. We know that they conceal their faith and get reservations. The issue here is Dalits got divided violently in this case as majority of the so called enlightened Dalit leaders have supported Jagan Mohan Reddy who is believed to be Christian and mother and other siblings are bible holding public persons. So some have supported govt. and even used abusive language against the doctor and his supporters also. Further, the doctor is also somewhat intemperate and has no friends at his workplace except one or two TDP or opposition leaders. Perhaps people do not know about the present status of the doctor. As per reports, he is surrendered to the govt. appealing to the CM to forgive him and reinstate him in his job. So this is a case study in the South, you will find hundreds of such cases due to lack of leadership and only Babasaheb chanting as the only movement among the educated job holders. The rural poor do not bother about them nor do they get any

tangible support from these groups, except on April 14 and Decembers 6 remembering Babasaheb at their locations for Whatsup op. I regret to say that recently people brought to my notice cases where some, not many, Dalit leaders make money as middlemen to solve untouchability, accident etc cases and collecting fees from both the parties. The lumpenisation of Dalit movement has taken place may be with the cunning support of upper caste clique as they know if Dalits are united and become a force, political manipulation would be difficult and therefore divide the Dalits. You know the sub caste movement was originated only from the South and among the literate and semiliterate groups with some genuine issues of unfairness, that could have been solved had they come together to sit and discuss. It is strange even left organizations; mostly the upper caste leaders have supported this division without any solution. They never thought and said that it is an intra- class problem with friendly contradictions and came forward to mediate and resolve. They are silent even in the case of ridiculous 10 per cent reservations for 5 per cent population in the name of EWS (those with 8 acres of land as assets). The intellectual class or so called public intellectuals (some exceptions) do not have a dispassionate approach to social issues.

What do you visualise now in the Post Covid India with millions of people returning to their home. Will there be more violence at the rural areas. As there are no jobs and no certainty how do you assess Indian social structure from a Dalit Bahujan perspective.

As I have been pointing out that agriculture sector in India is a residue social category that provides succor to the lower castes from the very beginning. That is the reason why 60 per cent of the rural labour force still lives on agriculture sector and interestingly while its contribution to GDP declining. In other words less and lesser wealth is being shared by more Dalits and Adivasis and upper castes share the increasing size of GDP from service sector. This contradiction, I don't know how many recognized it. I have published a paper (interestingly some Dalit scholars hesitate to cite fellow Dalits contributions) in EPW on the phenomenon of Dalits and OBCs returning to the traditional occupations mostly agriculture related operations after retrenchment during the golden handshake period in the 2000s. This phenomenon of agriculture supporting the traditional castes is a helpless inert behaviour of our rural

India. As a result, the number of people relying on agriculture remains almost the same for about a century while in other underdeveloped societies there is change. Now, the covid-19 brings the few who have gone in for urban non agriculture jobs including cleaning, washing, sweeping, petty vending etc jobs ( own account entrepreneurs) are returning to the rural areas. They constitute about 4 to 5 crores people mostly from Bihar, UP, Bengal, Odisha, Andhra where half the Dalit population of the country lives. This will create two kinds of tensions. 1 excess supply of labour even after lockdown might reduce the wage rate in rural areas. 2. It might trigger social tensions in rural areas; the returnees being shattered create problems within and also in relation to others. We need here not only Dalit leaders but also social activists to understand this problem and motivate them for a bigger fight in future.

What should government do to mitigate the current crisis. Should government not opt for fair implementation of Land Reforms laws so that rural poor particularly Dalit Bahujan can work on their own land and live a dignified life. Migration in India happened because of failed land reforms as the power equations in rural India were based on land ownership and Dalits were absolutely landless hence they were victimised and became easy target used as slave labour.

I have said recently in one meeting that British did not behave differently in the case of untouchables, even for the converts in distributing lands. In fact they have destroyed the stagnant social order of jajmani system in the rural areas where at least each caste has subsistence wage (need more studies) without providing an alternative. They have distributed lands to upper castes in thousands of acres in the name of permanent settlement and to temples, trusts etc and did not confiscate the Brahmin Agraharas. The experimental panchami lands for convert Dalits in the South did not help them and the amount was also limited. In fact land reforms to a large extent helped Dalits to own some bits and pieces. You may know the fact that up to August 1947 Dalits of Punjab were not allowed to own land due to caste prejudices. You don't find many Dalit organizations or Ambedkar associations working for land reforms, if the land reforms have come about, it may be due to the struggles of the left and democratic parties and the kulaks leaving for the urban non- farm sector. It is time that Dalits should struggle for economic demands including land reforms, jobs,

support for MSME, skill development in emerging areas, protecting public sector etc. You may allow the urban associations to work for social issues like untouchability, social discrimination, sub-caste assertion etc. and the activists work for the economic emancipation of the poor.

**You have spoken a lot about Social Economy of migration in India. Can you please elaborate as what is the reason and what can be done to resolve the current crisis.**

It is a big issue. Migration of labour has never been so serious before globalization. ILO and UNDP reports have indicated that there are around 74 crore migrants in different parts of the World. Around 20 crores are internal migrants before covid-19. The union government in its affidavit before the apex court said that there are 41 million informal migrant labourers during the covid-19 initial period. We in India have released the traditional occupations without any protection or premium during the post-LPG to make cheap labour available in urban service sector. We can take a simple example. Now upper caste educated women start working and earning, but they have families to look after. The rural women folk who either directly migrate or go along with families to urban areas provide domestic help to relieve the educated upper caste women for small price. We have conducted a study on domestic helps in Visakhapatnam and found that 99 per cent of them are drawn from SC and OBC families. There are other issues involved in this sector such as low paid jobs, no guarantee of job, abuse, no unions etc. The outmigration has also a social dimension. Like the cricket played by upper caste Brahmin and shudra boys being given more space in media than football or kabaddi etc of the socially marginalized groups, the remittances of the migrants did not receive adequate attention. We always talk about brain drain or brain crippled of those who have migrated to the West mostly USA with English medium education are from the Brahmin, Bania or upper shudra castes like Kamma, Reddy. But the migrants to GCC or oil exporting Muslim countries are drawn from lower OBC some SC castes with semi-skilled jobs do also contribute through remittances. The rupee value or dollar value of the remittances from GCC is higher than the USA and the number of migrants to Saudi is more than 1.5 crores while to USA they are limited to less than 5 million, of course they hold highly paid IT Finance etc service jobs and even emerging as CEOs. We are told, most of them are now



supporting Trump and the shrewd Trump came to Ahmedabad seeking Modi ji support is not a secret. Politics is not limited to a single nation's play now, it is international and with ICT several things might happen where Indian bhadralok have a role to play. The Indian voter is bribed and taken for granted with 24/7 media bash only to support fundamentalists. Therefore, they are not able to articulate their own needs as demands as seen during Covid-19, millions were walking hundreds of KMs without a leader. It seems there is some kind of an understanding among the competing parties that these are the wretched of the earth let them die, if they survive, we promise some crumbs and they will be persuaded through their caste leaders to vote for a price. Why should waste money on packages, better give this to business as credit plan of Rs 20 lakh crores. There is a need to rethink and reevaluate some of our old ideas and theories to make them relevant to our society and present conditions. You cannot have the luxury of leaving it to destiny, it is written on the wall, therefore take proactive and pro victims stand to unite all the victims to fight against all kinds of pandemics. This is the title of my monograph to be published in English and Telugu soon.

You were part of the Bhopal declaration initiated by the then chief minister Shri Digvijay Singh in Madhya pradesh. As jobs are declining and people are going back to their native places, the issue of developing entrepreneurship among Bahujan communities become important. Each state can adopt the diversity principle and buy produce or product developed by the Dalit Adivasi communities. Do you think this idea can resolve much of the issues of these communities.

Ans; Yes, Divijay Singh ji personally spoke to me and invited me to be Member of Planning Board of MP government and made me to participate in the deliberations of Bhopal declaration. I might say some personal anecdote here. I spoke to our friend ChandraBhan Prasad in Durban and told him that this meet may not help the Dalits in India. It has limited objective of internationalizing the issue, that we have achieved and we need to meet in India to pursue it further. It seems he spoke to Dr Amar Singh IAS and things moved quickly. The Bhopal Declaration is an ambitious statement of intent of Dalits and the commitment of Digvijay Singh government. We have in the planning board meetings accepted some of the recommendations like vendor quota in the allotment of arrack shops,

PDs etc and also land reforms. But Digvijay Singh got defeated and it was not pushed through. Some critiques say, the defeat was due to his ambitious Dalit strategy. There is another important issue that many people are not aware of where I had the opportunity to draft a policy paper for a Cabinet Minister for 4 per cent reservations that were pushed through in the cabinet. I am not supposed to say more than this. What I am trying to say is that there were few opportunities in the past to push through some demands of the poor and the socially marginalized for legitimate share in the cake. Now it is all gone. Yes, it is possible to demand a uniform universal policy of proportionate representation in all spheres of economic activities. I have been saying that the term reservations are related to 20<sup>th</sup> century where Justice Party had reserved jobs as per population of each caste in 1926 is diluted later in the name of reservations. The term is overused and abused carrying a stigma; need to be replaced by a term like representation. In a democratic polity or society proportionate representation is the ideal policy to provide opportunities to everyone in proportion to their caste or group population. Efficiency or Merit is part of it as the bright and the so called poor among the upper castes are given reservations now, takes care of it. Further, in a modern technological society attributing lack of efficiency to a group is fake and disparage to the whole community can be solved through proportionate representation in all processes including contracts and public allotments of resources. But this is an ambitious goal can be achieved through struggle and strategic moves.

# MANAS JENA

Development Initiative, Activist, Researcher and Writer,  
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*Deprivation from resources will increase inequality thus a threat  
to democracy and human rights.*

Manas Jena is one of the leading voices of the Dalit movement in Odisha. A prolific writer and columnist, Manas Jena has built up a huge network of young land rights activists fighting for the Dalit rights in Odisha.

You have been working on the Dalit Land Rights issue for long. Odisha is the state with rich mineral and mining areas. The governments have been ready to hand them over to big industrial corporations whether desis i.e. indigenous or international in the name of getting 'investment' without letting the people know as how much of this investment really goes to them. Not much is heard about Odisha's Dalit Land Rights issues. Could you please explain as what is the status of land Vis a Vis Dalit?

Yes, you are right. Odisha is one of the major minerals bearing states of India having varieties of vital minerals especially Coal, Bauxite, Chrome, Iron, Manganese, Graphite etc. The reserves are here, with good seaport facility and many other advantages which attracts FDI. The central and state Govts policy of privatization has been quite favourable to MNCs. So mining has been continuing.

Odisha is home to STs and SCs population who are more than 40% of the total population. SCs (Dalits), consists of 94 sub castes, are 17% of state population as per 2011 census. This number is not inclusive of many left out Dalits under SCs list such as Dalit Christians. Vast majority of Dalit household are in agriculture sector, forestry and fishing, mostly as

agriculture workers, sharecroppers and small and marginal farmers having less than one hector of holding. About 30% of the household have no homestead land and almost all have very restricted access to common property resources of the village because of untouchability practice. There has been no protection for the sharecroppers by the government. The post-fifties Land Reform Laws such as Estate Abolition Act and Odisha Land Reforms Act have been not much helpful to Dalit communities of the state. So the problem of landlessness, access to land, its legal ownership and possession has been persistent. There has been no visible Dalit mobilization and lack of political will along with missing of Dalit agenda and leadership in all most all political parties from right to left, socialist and centrists. The media and academics here also neglect Dalit issues. The post-nineties move has been in reverse direction of Land reform and the land distribution to Dalit has become a missing agenda even with left parties. Now, this land rights has further reduced to 4 decimal of homestead land only and that is also not being achieved till date after almost seventy years of the existence of the Law. Land being central to identity, housing basic amenities and food security has been neglected and it has continued ramifications over social and economic and political status of Dalit in rural parts.

The last seventy years, various governments have been more concerned in donating land to various companies for mining, industry and business in the name of development but land to the land less farmers has never been seen as a development agenda and the same approach continues.

Now there has been restrictions over free access to coast, forest areas and other forms of public resources such as water bodies which are the livelihood sources of Dalit. After the implantation of FRA the Dalit household in forest areas have been deprived of forest rights there has been a denial of forest land Patta to Dalit in many parts of the state and same is the situation with Dalit in fishing. The issues of huge distress migration and food security among Dalits are largely linked to Land ownership.

Odisha has been a Buddhist place but what we are witnessing in Odisha today is a Brahmanical revivalism. Even the opposition parties do the same. The Dalit consciousness in the form of Ambedkarism that came in the north India is visible absent. What are the reasons for this?

The Odisha has a written history of some 2300 years from the days of Kalinga war in 261 BC. There are Buddhist remains in many parts of the state such as Puspagiri, Ratnagiri and Lalitgiri, Udayagiri, Khandagiri in Jaipur and Bhubaneswar and other parts of the state. Odisha had a popular ruler named Kharavela (193BCE) who was a Jain king and Odisha had Janapadas, People's Republic, Buddhism, but these are in history.

In 12th century Adi-Sankaracharya has built a math in Puri to establish his philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. King Jajati Keshari, Somavamshi, (C.922-955) had organized Daswamedha Yajna at Jaipur the then capital of Odisha where he brought 10,000 Brahmins from Kanauji (Kanyakubja) North India and rehabilitated them by donating huge land and building temples. These process helped in replacing Buddhism and in a gradual spread of Brahminical ideas in social life.

But still, we have Adivasis and even Dalit who are untouched and have different belief system in practice which is very closer to Buddhism. There were also social movements against Brahminical ideas such as movement by BhimaBhoi (1850-1895).

Now as per 2011 census, 94 percent of the population of the state are declared as Hindu, they have even included all the Adivasis, officially as Hindu.

The state was ruled by Afghans, Mughals, and Maratha for some time. The southern part was under the control of French. During British rule, the modern Odisha came into existence on April 1<sup>st</sup> 1936 on the basis of linguistics with major areas of Coast, Cuttack, Puri, Balasore, Ganjam, Koraput and Sambalpur from western side and later in 1949 the greater Odisha came into existence with inclusion of 26 feudatory states ruled by kings. Odiya Nationalism has been built on Odiya language and Jagannath centric Hindu culture. The Odiya tracks unification movement was largely dominated by educated upper-caste Hindus, Jamindars and Kings and the trend continues in post-independence political, social, cultural and in other fronts leaderships also. It has been largely hereditary, hegemonic and become powerful and influential with modern political party based democracy and FPTP type of electoral systems.

The British Govt. first recruited Dalit as village guard and postal runner for their courage and hard work to serve the administration which was the opening and only scope available for participation in Govt. offices.

Untouchability and extreme poverty was rampant and there was no scope of formal institutional education till 1936. Utkal Harijan Sevak Sanga started first hostel for untouchable students in Cuttack city, the then capital of state but no caste Hindu were willing to rent a house and hence one Muslim rented his house for hostel of Dalit students.

Dr.Ambedker joined Indian politics in early 1920 but he could not give his organization a pan –India mold and Odisha was almost untouched. The Dalit communities in Odisha had been more inclined to the congress, socialist and communists during the freedom struggle. Jagajiban Ram had some contact with Odisha. Mr. Santanu Das of Jaipur was member of the constituent assembly. Till the 1990 there was very little Dalit consensus and Harijan concept has been dominated .with the entry of parties such as BSP and blowout of Dr. Ambedkar ideas through many Dalit organizations, slowly there has been some progress of Ambedkarite consciousness in the state but it will take some time because of the minimal presence of informed leadership and solid organizational process. There has been dominance of all India parties and organizations mostly from UP, Nagpur, Maharashtra and Delhi who are usually not allowing the local Dalit leadership to grow.

I do not know why Odisha always need a Patnaik at the helm of affair. Out of 70 years of our independent over 45-50 years have been dominated by Patnaiks in Odisha? To counter this, BJP might play another caste card? Why is an alternative in the forms of Dalit-Adivasi-minorities-OBCs not coming in Odisha? What are the hurdles and what should be done?

Yes, you see historically the Pattnaiks (Karan caste) had the privilege of upper caste Hindu next to Brahmins in social hierarchy and scope of education for generation together and they were closely associated with the Land revenue administration for last five hundred years. They were closer to kings and Jamindars in their administration and later during British rule they also occupied the same role along with Brahmins. Our first chief minister after independent was Nabakrushna Choudhury who was from Karana caste then the chief ministers were Biju Pattnaik, Janaki Pattnaik and now Navin Pattnaik who has been continuing since 2000 and is the longest serving chief minister of the state. Surprisingly now the president

of all major parties are also from the same caste. The party presidents of BJP, BJD, Cong, CPI and CPIM are from the same caste. Maybe they are popular among people, intelligent and most accommodative and there has been no effort by others to replace them. You know even most popular leaders like Lohiait Kishan Pattnaik and leftist Nagabhusan Pattnaik, socialist and communist respectively are from the same caste. Kishan Pattnaik wrote a book titled *Bharat Sudraka Hoga* (India will be Sudra's) which I translated and published sometimes back. Now the Kandayats who are just equal to Karana are coming up but they are coming under OBC, unfortunately, the MBC in OBC and SEBC are no way closer to Dalit and Adivasis. They practice same untouchability and even now in some parts Adivasis are also started practising untouchability. So the real political ideology binary of the state based on a Sudra-Dalit-Adivasi alliance has not been developed. The major political parties have been appropriating the leaders of marginalized sections and also their struggle. See, the early leaders of BJP here were Dalit and Adivasis and now the leader of the opposition is a Dalit from BJP. BJP has been projecting an OBC as its leader and congress and left have no plan to bring Dalit and Adivasi in leadership role. Why only political parties, the CSOs, Media and Academics also largely dominated by them. Almost all members of GPF and GPC, Sarbodaya, Gandhians, and NGOs also headed by upper-caste Hindus. Of course, it is not their mistake rather I should say others are not emerging as alternatives. Maybe here we have no one like Ram Vilas Paswan, Thirumavalama, Prakash Ambedkar, Mayavati, or Sibu Soren etc. Many of us propose to have a regional formation in the line you hints with Adivasi-Dalit –minority and OBC, maybe it will happen if the objective condition suits in the changing environment to build a more progressive Govt. with a fair representation of marginalized social groups But more than identity politics/caste-based representation what is require now a strong ideology of liberty, equality and fraternity, socialism, federal structure, Proportion representation electoral system, constitutional morality and inclusive governance that ensures democratic access to resources and a society without discrimination in the form including untouchability, caste, gender and ethnicity. It is also a fact that the backwardness of Odisha is because of the dominance of the centre and all India politics. So federal structure, decentralization of power is very much important. You know, now the central Govt. has almost control over the resources, minerals, water, forest, coast etc. There has been restriction over

resource mobilization by states. The right-wing nationalist politics has been depriving states and specially the marginalized sections within the state by using the same binary, Bharatmata and here Utkal Janani.

In Odisha land is being acquired, mining being given to big companies. We had big power plant here including Raurkela. Multinational giants like Vedanta and Posco also came but land redistribution has rarely been on the government agenda. I have not seen much progress on this front, which I call, first generational land reform in the form of Zamindari abolition and redistribution of it to the rural poor including SC-ST-OBCs.

As I already told Land distribution has been unfinished and now a missing agenda in the state. Now POSCO has withdrawn and the land is being transferred to another private company. The state Govt. has built a Land Bank with around 1lakh hector of land to handover to the private companies even Land once demarcated for distribution now cancelled and reserve for companies in mineral reserve areas. Mostly all the sons of former King and Jamindars are now getting divided into different parties and become the modern rulers. Sons of all 5 former chief ministers are in BJD, the regional ruling party for last 22 years.

You have been documenting cases of violence against Dalits and issue of caste discrimination and untouchability prevailing here. How strong are these value here? Violence seems to be less here but it seems ostracisation of Dalit and untouchability higher including non-entry of Dalits in the famous Jagannath Temple. Could you please explain in detail?

In spite of protective legislation against practices of untouchability and atrocities such as PCR Act 1955 and POA Act 1989. In the year 2018, the state has witnessed 1810 reported cases of atrocities against SCs ranging from rape, assault on women and children, murder, rioting, attempt to commit murder, hurt, house burning, arson, physical assault, and many more forms of heinous crime along with unabated practices of untouchability in many forms in rural villages. The National Records Bureau report for the year 2018 says that 10000+ atrocities cases have been pending for trial, in different courts of the state, whereas the conviction



rate was only 3 percent. Non-official survey revealed that about 200 different forms of untouchability practice have been existing in rural villages. It includes residential segregation, seating separately in Aganwadi centres, during mid-day meal in schools, separate hostels for students, a separate bathing place, drinking water sources, cremation ground, two glass system in tea stalls and eateries, not allowed in saloons and public places, temples, honour killing to prevent inter-caste marriage and many more.

**What are the forms of untouchability in Odisha? Has there any concrete action by the government in this regard ?**

There are around 200 forms of untouchability practice have been prevalent in state of Odisha. It includes separate hamlet, Bathing Ghat, cremation ground, water bodies, tube wells, village market, saloon, separate glass, eateries, tea stalls, village temples, separate seating in village meetings, No Dalit cook are allowed in schools and Aganwadies, festival processions by Dalits are prohibited, inter-caste marriage between caste Hindu and untouchables, asking caste while renting a house in cities, and many more

**The issue of reservation has always haunted Odisha's upper-caste political leadership. Late Biju Patnaik was openly opposed to Mandal Commission recommendation and I dont think Navin Patnaik has changed that politics. Why are politicians so blatantly anti reservationists in Odisha? Will you share with us as what is the percentage of reservation actually being implemented in the government services?**

Yes, Late Biju Pattnaik opposed Mandal Commission recommendation and his son the present chief minister also not implementing reservation for OBCs. Here in the state the SEBC has only 11 % reservation and the state has not implemented even 27% of reservation in the state. The reservation for SCs and STs also have not been implanted properly in job and educational institutions and in other areas such as business, housing and entrepreneurship development as per the proportion of the population which is near to 40 percent. These days there has been no reservation in promotion though certain posts are being filled up by promotion. There has been continued discrimination against employees of SCs, STs and

OBCs in the state secretariat and mostly the privileged upper caste has hegemony over state administration.

**What is the status of Dalit Adivasi students in the Universities? Are they getting scholarships or not? What kind of discriminations are they facing?**

Dalit students are getting a scholarship but the social discrimination in educational institutions has been continuing. These days in many educational institutions the SCs and STs Students are coming up and slowly trying to get organized themselves and there is some hope in it. The reservation for SCs and STs Students has not been implanted as per their percentage i.e 16.25% for SCs and 22.5% for STs and there has been no monitoring and transparency in it. You know as per Article 164, a tribal should head the tribal department as a cabinet minister with additional charge of SCs and OBCs in states having 5<sup>th</sup> scheduled area who supposed to monitor this.

**Manual scavenging is still prevalent in Odisha in different forms which may not be directly visible in capital city or other metros but still in smaller towns. Most of the safai work is privatized and people are getting much less salary. Their jobs are temporary and no housing, no medical and no leaves. Do you think that government as well as society have rarely been sympathetic to manual scavenging community? If yes then why so?**

Manual scavenging is no more visible but in very few places it still exists however the condition of the Safai Karmacharies has not been improved. Officially the State government has been denying through an affidavit in Supreme Court about the non –prevalence of manual scavenging which contradicts the 2011 census data.

The state government has not developed any specific action plan for their rehabilitation and development despite law, programme and commissions. You know, there is The prohibition of employment as manual scavengers and their rehabilitation Act 2013, National Commission for Safai Karmacharies and National Safaikarmachari Finance and development corporation but nothing has been substantially done by the state government majority of Sanitary workers are landless they have no

homestead land either in the village or in the cities. They are lowest in the caste ladder and untouchability practice is rampant against them. Now the sanitary work in cities has been privatized and they become contractual workers, they work in most unhygienic condition without any personal protective equipment and paid less and live in most deprive condition.

**Was there ever a reform movement against caste discrimination or Untouchability in Odisha? If yes, what was it?**

You have heard about Bhima Bhoi a poet and reformer who questioned the dominance of upper caste Brahmin, Kings and Jamindars and opposed the idol worship, caste and untouchability practices. He opposed the prevailing religion and its rituals.

**You have written about Dr Ambedkar's vision for Odisha's development which he presented in a conference when he came here. Could you share with us and how relevant his thoughts are related to Odisha's development?**

Dr Ambedkar's economic thoughts are based on the principles of equality and State ownership over means of production. He argued for nationalization of land and other means of production. He was suggesting for the fullest utilization of natural resources and human power to fulfil the material needs of the people with active State involvement. He argued for compact holding to be beneficial for agriculture production while avoiding too much agriculture. As a trade unionist, he played a major role in bringing labour legislation to regulate eight working hour and ensuring benefits of minimum wage, social security, insurance, equal wage and maternity benefit for women workers and banned child labour.

He argued for one State, one language and said linguistic provinces would make democracy work better than a mixed language province. He was always in favour of federalism which gives legislative, executive and judicial power to States in managing the governance of the States. In recent times while the States are demanding financial autonomy and power to manage resources, the discourses developed by Dr Ambedkar has become more relevant for resource rich poor States.

Many of his thoughts and proposals are still relevant and draw public attention in discussion on policy-making and planning of projects of

political and economic significance. His insightful proposals are based on information and scientific analysis and mostly targeted to public good with equity.

In the context of continuous visit of flood and drought and its damaging impact over economy of Odisha and its slow progress under developed economy, the speech made by Dr Ambedker in 1945 at Cuttack still remains relevant to the people in the State after sixty years of the death of this visionary leader. His understanding and proposals for Odisha's development by fighting low income, poverty, diseases and inaccessibility through proper scientific management of available vast water resources need to be discussed widely by the people of the State.

Dr Ambedkar visited Odisha as the Labour Member in Viceroy's Executive Council to the Government of India. In his presidential address at a conference of representatives of Central Government and Government of Odisha, the central provinces and eastern States held at Cuttack on November 8, 1945, he explored the possibilities of developing Odisha Rivers to control flood while managing water for its best multipurpose use for the people. He made valuable opinion relating to the development of Odisha based on information which is still relevant in the present context. He was worried after realizing the socio-economic realities of the people in those days. He identified flood, drought, famines, deterioration in health, malaria, malnutrition, vitamin deficiency and above all, low income and poverty as the major issues of Odisha. While discussing about the underdevelopment and backwardness, he referred to learn from the drought of 1866 which was a major cause of tragic loss of life of thousands of poor people in Odisha.

He also identified lack of internal communication links within the State either by railway or by canal to connect the vast hinterland with sea coast. He said Odisha has natural resources, minerals, coal, chromite, graphite, limestone, iron ore, mica and forest products, bamboo, and precious possession of vast water wealth. The delta comprising of three districts Cuttack, Puri and Baleswar can be traversed by a network of distributaries arising mainly from five rivers, Mahanadi, Brahmani, Baitarani, Budhabalanga and Subarnarekha for multipurpose use of water in all seasons. The poverty and backwardness of Odisha can be changed by using best method of utilization of water resources.

He was critical about the Odisha flood inquiry committee report in 1928 and the subsequent reports in 1937 and Odisha Flood Advisory committee report in 1939 with involvement of eminent engineers such as Adams William and M Visvesvarayya, on their approach to counter flood without a water management plan to utilize the excess water flows into the sea. Because the plan of only building embankments is not helpful in conservation of water, there is a need of building small reserves to store the water flowing in the rivers. Water being the wealth of people its distribution and conservation is highly essential from the point of view of public good. He suggested to construct dams in rivers at various points to conserve water permanently in reservoirs and these reservoirs can serve many purposes such as generating electric power. The power can be helpful in running factories to make Odisha industrially developed. Another important area was navigation which was equally important and can supplement the railways. He told in spite of railways, the importance should be given to canals by reviving old canals and make new one like Germany and Russia. While supporting the scheme of canal, he said historically canal played an important role in British India and the East India Company invested public budget for development of canals and Odisha has one such canal having its multipurpose use but after 1875 the focus was more on railway replacing canal navigation. It impacted agriculture and overall economy and changed the nature of public investment.

He proposed that it is possible to connect Chandabali to Sambalpur by a navigable inland waterway by construction of three dams at seven mile above Naraj, Tikarpada and Sambalpur. It will be affordable, cheap and convenient artery for passengers and goods traffic from sea coast to Sambalpur. He was equally concerned about submergence of land and its impact. Finally, the conference decided to undertake a survey of the Odisha Rivers to prepare projects for unified and multipurpose development like flood control, navigation, irrigation, drainage, soil conservation and power development. Adviser to the then Governor of Odisha BK Gokhale also spoke on the meeting in support of the proposal of Dr Ambedkar and said Odisha is the most backward part of India and this irrigation project will bring multipurpose development for the State.

While Odisha has been continuing its struggle to change the problems outlined by Dr Ambedkar in 1945 the suggestions proposed by him have

been still relevant in the context of utilization of water resources which is very central to the development of Odisha. The natural advantage of Odisha with river systems, as a perennial source of water wealth, has not been fully tapped and managed for the development of irrigation which is a major reason of underdevelopment of agriculture sector of the State. The development of agriculture will pave the way for industrialization where the water management will play a key role in producing power for the industry. The available hydropower will boost the small scale industries especially the agro-based industries for balanced sectorial growth in the State. The utilization of natural resources and manpower in a scientific way will increase production, employment and income in the State and the backward economy can be changed.

Is there any Ambedkarite movement in Odisha, if yes, then could you give us details of when it started and what were the major achievements of it.

Yes , After nineties there has been growing interest among people of the state and slowly it is taking up in many forms among employees, students and youth and political parties, CSOs and among common masses but it has been diverse and disperse in many ways but still there is hope in it.

You have been a regular columnist with Daily Pioneer in Odisha which is a remarkable achievements as people read your articles regularly on various issues. Your writings cover vast subject. My question in this regard is simple. One how many journalists or columnists from marginalized sections are there in Odisha papers and magazines or electronic media. Have you found any space for the Dalit and Adivasis in Odishan Newsrooms?

I must thank daily Pioneer, Bhubaneswar edition, for providing me this opportunity. Coming to the newsroom and print media in Odisha there has been very insignificant participation of Dalit and Adivasis and also very little space has been provided to their issues. Dalit and Adivasis have to take up this challenge. These days media become more Brahminical and pro-corporate so we should develop alternative media such as small and medium prints and other possible web portals, social media etc. to ventilate our thought and issues before the public especially before the working class/Bahujan.

Your column is not related to Dalit issues in Odisha as you have reflected on diverse issues like education, economic issues, SEZs, health care and so on. Why didn't you confine yourself writing on Dalit issues in Odisha? Was there ever a pressure on you not to write on these issue or it was a conscientious decision on your part?

No, if you go through my writings, you will find most of the Dalit specific issues and issues of marginalized sections, SC and STs, OBCs of the state has been highlighted. I have tried to expand the Dalit issues to larger perspective and in the context. There was no such pressure on me on what to write or what to not write.

You have been trying to bring Ambedkarite, left and other likeminded people in Odisha to form a coalition against the onslaught of Brahmanical capitalist forces. At the moment when elections have become so expensive how are you going to face the challenge unless you also look upon to create resources for spreading the movement?

As I told you we need both annihilation of caste and scientific socialism. Yes, I have been feeling that the forces of radical change in the state such as peoples movement, Ambedkarite, Marxist and others concern should come together to fight social and economic issues together and make all possible effort to get elected to highest law/policy-making bodies of governance. Yes, you are right resources are a reality these days but our strategy of struggle must address these issues also but not just concern for ideological struggle and unity. We have not yet engage our self for a unified struggle but this is the right time to come together.

You have been a leading campaigner for Campaign on Electoral Reforms in India (CERI). What is the status of the campaign? Do you plan to revive it again as the issue is very important and India is at the crossroad when fascist forces with active support from Brahmanical capitalist media and industries are supporting him. Political opposition is mute and has surrendered hence it seems the only way to fight it out is revival of the people's movement and also campaign for democratization of political parties and social movements. Your take on this.

You know after death our dear friend M C Raj, the prime mover of the campaign, there has been a slowdown in the campaign for number of reasons includes resources for the campaign etc. But India needs Proportional Representation System as many political parties specially left and former election commissions already agree to it. We, all the state leaders, have to meet to discuss and take a decision to take it forward. But not just electoral reform there must be movement for democracy, constitution and secularism and socio-economic justice. In a parliamentary democracy like ours the role of political parties are very much important but political parties have very little practice inner-party democracy in functioning and decision making process. The family rule and caste and communal mobilization need to be changed. State funding of elections can be a solution to control the entry of corporates in funding to parties. Now the change of FCRA law is more favourable to political parties.

Could you please inform about yourself as how did you join the social movement and what is your ultimate goal of life related to people of Odisha.

I did my post-graduation in Economics and graduation in Law from Utkal University. While I was in BJB college, Bhubaneswar I came in contact with left student movement and work for the party for some time then I left the party during Mandal movement and work as independent activists of people's movement. For some time I was associated with Kisan Pattnaik, Medha Pathakar and B D Sharma. I was also national co-convenor of NCDHR and heading the Dalit land rights movement, NFDLRM and WSF. I did extensive travel all over India on issues of land and mining and did research and advocacy on issues of Dalit atrocity, land and mining displacement and environmental issues affecting people in mineral bearing areas. I have been associated with CERI as its cofounder and forums like AIPF to take up issues of democracy, electoral reform and Dalit atrocities and land rights. In Odisha we are building Odisha Dalit Adhikar Manch, a state-level platform of Dalit communities in the state and primarily addressing the issues of untouchability, caste-based discrimination and atrocities against Dalits and Dalit access to land and basic amenities along with other policy issues such as reservation in private sector, land reform, universalization of education and health care, social security of unorganized sector workers.



You contested Lok Sabha election on Congress party ticket. Why did you chose Congress party because your background is of an Ambedkarite? Is Congress still relevant in Odisha? What has been your experience in the elections?

From the very beginning, I have been more inclined to left and democratic ideas/forces. As I belong to Dalit community and have been committed for Dalit cause. During last 30 years of my public life since students days, I have been more influenced by Buddhist ideas, Bhīma Bhoi, Atheism, Dr. Ambedkar, Phule, Periyar as my ideals and equally, I am also influenced by Marxists, left parties. I realized we need annihilation of caste, atheism as well as scientific socialism as economic system.

Within Odisha Dalit Adhikar Manch we have been debated extensively to play a political role in the last election to fight the communal forces and against rapid privatization. Many of our friends in Dalit movement from different states also had a discussion at AICC office in New Delhi. The present OPCC president was also willingly accepted my candidature and encouraged me. So I contested the election as a congress candidate and many left and democratic forces also supported me. It was a rear experience as I first time contested the election from a party which is quite new to me both politically, ideologically and organizationally. I campaigned against the communal politics but I realized that elections become too much expensive and there has been lack of ideological and organizational consistent in grass root during elections. Election has to be fought more on the strength of the candidate than the party.

There has been lot of pressure on social activists, dissenters, writers and even NGOs in the last one year. Cases have been filed against people on the very simple pretext but creating an image as if everyone is part of a big 'international conspiracy' to defame India or destabilize the government. Unfortunate part is even the people who should have been speaking on this issue remain quiet. Why do you think we have become so self-centric that we do not speak?

No, many of us are quite vocal on this in social and print media and also in other platforms where ever it is possible people are coming forward and condemning the undemocratic move of the Govt. we all should come together in such emergency like situation to defend whatever we have achieved as a largest democracy but unfortunately Many of the NGOs have

contributed for de-politicization of the marginalized section in the name of development and welfare in the absence of a holistic understanding on political-economy of issues and structure of the state .

So called development interventions have discouraged identity politics require for assertion of marginalized sections and it has also contributed to slowdown radical changes and not questioned the age old structural issues and hegemonies that continues in different forms. Even the vast majority of civil society leaders are drawn from the privileged caste /class those who have not experienced deprivation and marginalization/discrimination in their own life struggle. So who sets the agenda in civil society, who managed the resources and decides on behalf of the marginalized in India has been a big question.

**How do you see the Post Covid world? Will land agenda be relevant? How should we move ahead to strengthen the resource right agenda at the time when the government is determined for rabid privatization.**

This pandemic (COVID -19) situation is hitting the marginalized poor the worst because of their inherent vulnerable condition. The entire country is being converted to a police state with an absolute power exercised by police to mercilessly beat anyone on street. It is mostly the poor and marginalized on the streets who are being harassed and humiliated. The socially and economically privileged groups with, advantageous access, to all kinds of opportunities are relatively in a better-off position to face the crisis. Religious fanatics and privileged castes brigade continue to preach their kinds of congenital hegemonic binary everywhere mainly governance, media, academics, CSOs which have been generalizing the victimization without differentiation.

But when most daily wage earners and other poor are being asked to stay at home, along with to maintain physical distancing, the governing system has forgotten they have been struggling for a living with inadequate basic amenities, water and sanitation, and are surviving in a mere small living space called as home for the whole three generation family staying under the common roof. Let's look at Dalit hamlets in rural villages of Odisha and the status of basic amenities in the context of COVID19 and implementation of measures such as hand wash and physical distancing, and lockdown at home, etc.

COVID-19 has shown us our own reality. How we are poor in managing health and employment issues, an insensitive rather inhuman society not at all concern for its workers, our panic ness to pandemic like emergencies.

Now it is argued that capitalism is more effective than managers of public sector whose commitments of last 70 years are in public scrutiny. Now we have more discussion on nationalism but less nationalization. Nationalism become religion only to believe but not being translated into practice, nationalist are not ready to manage the national resources. It is re-imposing of caste like discrimination and bring back imperialism in form of FDI which is depriving masses from resources and opportunities and allowing very few to own and manage.

Land has become more important in post COVID because finally what we saw that the 10 crore migrant workers of India are returned to their village / homestead land and they all are looking for food security which only land can ensure that. Resource in any form must be democratically distributed among people for life and livelihood. Deprivation from resources will increase inequality thus a threat to democracy and human rights.



# ANTONIO TONY QUIZON

Former Director, ANGOC, Philippines

*Strengthen secure access to land and natural resources of the  
communities to eradicate hunger and Poverty*

Antonio “Tony” Quizon is the former Executive Director and Chairperson of the Asian NGO Coalition (ANGOC). He devoted over 40 years working directly with farmer communities, social movements and civil society organizations. He started as a student leader, joined social movements at the age of 14, and later became a community organizer, human rights advocate and journalist – for which he was arrested twice and imprisoned as a political detainee under Martial Law in the Philippines. He later served as secretary-general of a national peasant federation and was a key member of the Congress for a People’s Agrarian Reform. He was engaged with, amongst others, the World Bank-NGO Committee, CGIAR-NGO Committee, CGIAR External Review Panel, and was a Board member of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies. He initiated the Global Campaign on the Asian Development Bank to demand public accountability for its social and environmental impacts. He has done research and evaluation work for IFAD, FAO, ADB and UNDP, among others. He was among the founders of the International Land Coalition (ILC) and served as its first regional director for Asia. Tony has several published works on agrarian reform, land governance, participatory tools, government-NGO relations, as well as on economy and ecology. His works include “Land Governance in Asia” and an “Assessment of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program in the Philippines, 1987-2015” for the National Historical Commission of the Philippines. Tony also served as guest faculty with Xavier University and the University of the Philippines. He currently works with civil society organizations in the Philippines and Asia working on agrarian reform, sustainable agriculture and community-based plant genetic resource conservation. In 2018, he

received the Lifetime Recognition for Land Rights from the ILC Asian Regional Assembly.

Tony's interest in working with farmers perhaps started as he was growing up. His father came from a rice-farming family, who worked for 40 years as an Agronomist with the Department of Agriculture. His mother worked as a statistician with the Bureau of Census and Statistics and was responsible for the national agriculture census.

How are the indigenous people placed in the Philippines? What is their status? Many countries in Asia have not really accepted the 'indigenous people' theory and call it a colonial attempt to create divisions. Is this issue accepted in the political and social parlance of the Philippines without any controversy?

The Philippines has about 12 to 15 million indigenous peoples distributed among 110 different ethno-linguistic groups or "cultural communities". In a way, this reflects the wide diversity of our population of over 100 million in a country of 7,100 islands. A vast majority of indigenous communities reside in the uplands with the remaining bio-diverse ecosystems that they claim as part of their ancestral domains. However, most of them still have no legal recognition over their traditional lands. Many are prevented from freely conducting their livelihood activities and from exercising their traditional governance.

This year exactly marks the 500<sup>th</sup> year since the start of Spanish colonization of the Philippines in 1521. The Spanish *conquistadores* introduced private property under the *Regalian doctrine*, claiming all lands and natural resources under the Crown by virtue of its investment in the expedition and by conquest. All lands on the fringes of permanent settlements and farms were claimed by the state as "crown lands", introducing the concepts of the "public domain". From these lands, large tracts called *encomiendas* were carved out as land gifts to the Spaniards and Filipino elites for their services. From this evolved private property and large plantations called *haciendas*. Indigenous and traditional systems of communal land ownership were broken up and natives stripped of their rights. Over time, many moved further upland, away from state centres, in a process that the author James Scott called the "peopling of the hills".

Over the centuries, the political elites played a major role in the fragmentation and dissolution of ancestral lands. Through concessions and leaseholds, much these “public domain lands” were distributed to favoured interests, often aided by new laws and the use of military force.

Under American occupation, the Regalian doctrine was enshrined in the Commonwealth government of 1935, and later in the Constitutions of the Republic. So-called public lands were classified as “mining lands”, “timber lands”, etc. The introduction of new land registration and titling systems brought widespread landgrabs and further disenfranchisement especially among indigenous peoples. This was also instrumental in the entry of large capitalist plantations especially into Mindanao, in Southern Philippines. Our 1935 Constitution and subsequent laws also copied many features of the Indian reservations in the US. They created “reservations for the use of non-Christian tribes”, managed under the government’s Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes.

Under the Republic, indigenous peoples continued to suffer from landlessness, poverty, oppression and discrimination – as many still continue to experience to this day. After World War II, the increased demand for resources brought in mining, timber and plantation companies to public lands. The situation of indigenous cultural communities was further aggravated with the intrusion of large infrastructure projects, especially dams under the Marcos dictatorship. Global capital further pushed further inland with the liberalization of markets and investments starting in the 1990s.

Meanwhile, official recognition of the concept of “indigenous peoples” grew out of the struggle of indigenous communities to regain control over their own traditional domains and cultural spaces. Localized, community-specific struggles starting in the 1950s later grew into issues of wide public awareness and debate – especially in highly-publicized conflicts, such as in the Chico River Dam Project in Northern Philippines. Similar struggles of indigenous communities were being recorded and shared in other areas of the world. The parallel formation of peoples’ movements and supporting networks, and their links, brought further realization that the struggle of indigenous communities was a global phenomenon and not just a set of localized conflicts.

According to Dave de Vera of PAFID, a first step in policy reform came in 1974, when the Ikalahan indigenous community in Nueva Viscaya province successfully negotiated Memorandum of Agreement No. 01, which legally recognized them as the stewards and managers of some 16,500 hectares of forest land. Although this agreement did not cover the entire ancestral domain of the Ikalahan people, it recognized their communal systems of management. It also decriminalized the harvesting of resources for domestic use – a far cry from earlier state policies that treated indigenous communities as “destroyers of forests”.

What is the status of land reforms in the Philippines? Has this been successful in getting people justice or have the social and cultural prejudices against the indigenous people hampered the land reform process?

Starting in the 1950s, peasant revolts were addressed through land reform policies along with state suppression. At the time, owing to its colonial history, the Philippine agrarian situation seemed to bear a closer resemblance to the Latin American model than to other Asian countries – with its traditional Spanish-style *haciendas* and US-style capitalist plantations alongside widespread tenancy and landlessness. Successive land reform policies since the 1950s, however, were instituted more to combat peasant insurgency, rather than to institute social justice. Land ceilings were set too high, and the required funding was not allocated by the landlord-controlled Congress. Most of the reforms involved the establishment of new land settlements, and the recognition of settlers on public lands. The former proved to be not only a costly approach, but in some cases created land conflict between new migrants and existing communities on site, including those of indigenous peoples.

Land reforms in 1963 and 1972 were still limited in scope, but they did provide some breakthroughs in terms of measures to legally protect the tenure of tenants, and recognition of the concept of “land-to-the-tiller”. However, there were adverse effects of reforms, as many tenants were ejected by their landlords. Also, the emphasis on “agrarian” lands meant that indigenous land rights were not included in these earlier land reforms.

Major land reforms came shortly after the People Power Revolution of 1986 that toppled the Marcos dictatorship. Following the 1987 “social



justice” Constitution, two major land reform laws were instituted – the 1988 Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) and the 1997 Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA). Yet, these reforms did not come easy. We had to directly lobby with the President and Congress. I remember joining the peasant delegation that met with President Aquino, and I also testified before the Senate Committee. We organized several mass actions including the largest Agrarian Reform Express that brought some 100 thousand farmers from all across the country to Manila. We set up a “tent city” in front of Congress, and even held protests inside the halls of Congress and disrupted their proceedings.

Right after the law was passed in 1988, little did we know that this “victory” would later test our patience and perseverance, as we (peasant groups land rights advocates) had to fight for each small detail in the reform process every step of the way. All throughout the past 34 years, we have fought off efforts from landlords, Congress and the bureaucracy itself – to derail or to water down the reform process – in the form of land conversions, harassment and threats, exemptions, bureaucratic processes and court cases. CARP was due to be completed in 10 years, but until now it remains unfinished 34 years later.

As of 2018, government figures show that under CARP, about 4.8 million hectares of *private* farmlands have been transferred to their tillers, and some 2.5 million hectares of public land have been titled to their occupants. This has given many peasants, tenants and farm-workers a greater sense of security, independence and optimism. In my fieldwork during the early years of CARP, I immediately saw the tangible effects of land reform in a former sugarcane hacienda – as shiny galvanized iron sheets quickly replaced the thatched nipa roofs in farmers’ houses, and you could hear the sound of karaoke singing from farmers’ homes. Impact studies also show land reform has resulted in modest improvements in the productivity, incomes and assets of farmers, as well as in the education of rural children. However, while CARP has contributed positively to poverty reduction, the improvements have not been bold enough to bring significant numbers of the rural poor out of poverty. A major gap identified has been in the lack of reform in *contested private lands* under compulsory acquisition – where the impact on poverty would have been greatest. Another gap has been the lack of agricultural support services,

especially for the poorest farmers. This shows that land reform should be supported by other broader initiatives at rural development.

The implementation of IPRA for the indigenous peoples met similar hurdles. The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 was a radical law that instituted rights to ancestral “domains” (including water bodies, not just land). It also provided for self-delineation, free-prior-and-informed-consent (FPIC) prior to any kind of outside interventions, and the rights of cultural communities to self-governance. A National Commission for Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) was created. However, the government bureaucracy with its old mind-set did not know how to implement the law, and some government sectors continued to challenge the law’s provisions. Legal challenges went all the way up to the Supreme Court. Meanwhile, civil society organizations and IP communities had to lead the way in formulating the guidelines and procedures for IPRA’s implementation. These included the requirements for FPIC, the practice of community mapping and self-delineation, and the on-ground participatory methods for preparing Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plans (ADSDPPs). Whatever has been achieved to date has been largely due to these civil society efforts.

As of 2018, some 5.4 million hectares of ancestral land and waters have been covered under 221 Certificates of Ancestral Domain Titles (CADTs) that have been issued. Many other ancestral domain claims are still pending. However, only 50 of the 221 CADTs have been legally registered with the Land Registration Authority, due to a Joint Administrative Order in 2012 that prohibited the registration of any land, if even a part of it is under contestation. And, as we all know and expect, the given reality is that all ancestral lands have been contested for centuries. Moreover, the other reality is that private interests and sectors of government continue to deny indigenous communities of their rights, despite their being CADT-holders. Mining and timber licenses issued by government continue to overlap with ancestral domains, causing land conflicts.

Those who wish to read more can access an assessment we wrote in 2018 entitled “State of Land and Resource Tenure Reform – Philippines 2018” at the following link: <https://angoc.org/portal/state-of-land-and-resource-tenure-reform-in-the-philippines-2018/>

Are the farming communities categorised in your country like small, middle or big? If yes, can you share with us how are they defined?

If this refers to farm size, and their distribution across the farming population, then yes we can perhaps categorize farms as small, low-middle, upper-middle and large based on the agrarian reform law, and on how the government collects farmland data.

Based on my own assessment, I would say that those with 3 hectares and below would constitute “small” farmers in the Philippines. Three hectares is the maximum size of land that can be transferred to a farmer beneficiary, under agrarian reform. However, the average size transferred over the past 30 years is actually 1.7 hectares.

Farms above 3 hectares to about 7 hectares could be considered as those of “lower-middle” farmers. Based on an earlier 1972 land reform law, 7 hectares is the land retention ceiling for landowners of rice and corn lands. So these are likely to be landowners who retain part of their former landed wealth, some of whom might also be engaged directly in farming themselves.

Farms between 7 hectares and 25 hectares in size might be called as “upper-middle” farmers. These farms might be run under some cooperative arrangement, and usually involve cashcrops, rather than food crops, or else poultry and livestock.

Farms above 25 hectares in size would be large, usually corporate farms. Some might also be run as collective or cooperative farms.

Recomputing the 2012 Agricultural Census data, the farm-size distribution would be as follows:

Farm size	Number	%	Area (hectares)	%
<i>Small</i> 1 to 2.99 hectares	4,945,298	88.9	3,481,679	48.4
<i>Lower-middle</i> 3 to 7 hectares	518,046	9.3	2,112,232	29.4
<i>Upper-middle</i> 7.01 to 24.99 hectares	93,759	1.7	1,018,336	14.2
<i>Large</i> 25 hectares ++_	5,474	0.1	577,840	8.0

TOTAL	5,562.577	100.0	7,190,087	100.0
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Source: Philippine Statistics Authority, 2012

**Is the process of land distribution a federal subject or there are enough powers to local governments? Has there been any honest efforts to give land to the poor?**

The Philippines has a centralized, Presidential form of government, with some level of local autonomy instituted after 1991. When we advocated for the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law in the 1986-88 period, we insisted that a Presidential Agrarian Reform Committee be created by law, so that the president would be directly accountable to the people for its implementation, and not some appointed bureaucrat. Also, the reform was to be implemented by the Department of Agrarian Reform from the national to the local level, as we have always been wary of the local traditional politicians who have traditionally constituted the country's biggest landlords.

That such an agrarian reform law would pass a landlord-dominated Congress in 1988 was seen as a major achievement in itself, even though many of our original proposals were watered-down. Even then, we (land rights advocates and social movements) tried our best to make the most out of a "limited" reform law. Over the past 30 years, several land rights advocates joined the Department of Agrarian Reform, while the rest of us continued our political pressure from the outside. This "in-and-out" strategy helped to ensure continued implementation of agrarian reform.

There were up-and-down successes in agrarian reform over the years, depending on which government was in power. But over time, agrarian reform implementation has slowed down especially today under the current President Duterte. There is over half a million hectares of farmland still due to be redistributed, according to estimates. And because of the pandemic, there is little monitoring of the work of the Department of Agrarian Reform, because of other more pressing concerns.

Today, we no longer have large and massive land movements as we had before, particularly in the agrarian reform movement. In agrarian reform, many farmer groups began to shift their efforts from political work to socio-economic development projects, as they gained their land – building

cooperatives, and linking their farms to markets. Political work continues – in the form of continued organizing of communities, and legal education (ex, training of farmer para-legals). In a way, much of the energy of the agrarian reform movement is now diffused & focused on addressing thousands of individual, local land cases that still need to be resolved. There are still thousands of farmer families who should have been covered by agrarian reform but remain landless.

If yes, how much land has been distributed and how many people are still landless?

As of 2018, about 4.8 million hectares of *private* farmlands have been transferred to their tillers, and some 2.5 million hectares of public land have been titled to their occupants. Yet about 600 thousand hectares remain pending for redistribution, although CSO estimates peg the real number at nearly a million hectares (based on 2018 data). For indigenous peoples, some 5.4 million hectares of ancestral land and waters have been covered by ancestral domain titles. However, there are many more pending claims for ancestral domain titles, as no new titles have been issued over the past several years.

Meanwhile, the Philippines does not generate any statistics at all on “landless” people or families. Any statistics generated is also likely to hide the true extent of the problem. For one, multiple families are often forced to live under the same household, because of the lack of land and houses, even in rural areas.

In one area that we assisted, for instance, I was surprised that the farming community quickly grew from 98 houses to 164 houses just one year after the land certificates were issued. We discovered two reasons for this: one, the married children in the same household started to build their own homes, and two, landless migrant labourers set up their own shanties in the fringes of the community, often by the roadside or beside canals.

Under a land-to-the-tiller program, the direct agrarian reform beneficiaries are often those who reside on the land (in-situ). Oftentimes, migrant rural labourers are not covered or remain “invisible” in surveys. And even if they are identified as potential beneficiaries, they are often assigned to patches of land outside of their community or chosen areas of work.

What are the reasons for land conflict in the Philippines? Are there feudal lords in your country or it was a colonial invention to control and oppress the indigenous people there?

A lot of land conflicts in the Philippines can be traced to their historical roots in colonialism. These include agrarian conflicts between tenants/farmworkers and landlords/corporations, the continuing struggles of indigenous communities for recognition of their ancestral domain rights, and in the struggle of the Moro peoples in Mindanao (South) for their land and cultures. Moreover, over time, new layers of conflict have grown over the old ones – as when land is taken and reallocated by the State, or when private and corporate interests are given large-scale leases or concessions over lands occupied or used by others. This has been compounded by an inefficient and corrupt system of land administration that persisted over the years.

A 2018 study done by Tim Salomon of ANGOC documented 352 active land conflict cases covering 1,281,390 hectares. This is highly significant, as it covers about 4 percent of the entire land territory of the country. Moreover, this number only includes the major and large land cases, and excludes the individual disputes between two parties. (For instance, in 2017, the DAR recorded a total caseload of 32,000 agrarian cases submitted for quasi-judicial resolution plus 64,000 cases covered by mediation.)

The 2018 ANGOC study found that out of the 354 cases, there were 7 main “causes” of land conflicts: (1) agrarian reform conflicts (12% of total cases); (2) overlapping land claims due to overlapping laws (23%); (3) resource use conflicts, such as over water allocation and use (10%); (4) forestry investments and concessions (2%); (5) extraction and mining (12%); (6) agribusiness investments concessions (29%); and, (7) infrastructure investments (11%). Thus, most of the conflict cases usually involved communities vs. corporations/ private investments and communities vs. government projects (dams, infrastructure). There were also cases of communities vs communities, such as when DAR awarded

lands to farmer-settlers that were part of an ancestral domain claim of indigenous peoples.<sup>1</sup>

How serious are the government as well as people to the question of the climate crisis in your country?

Climate change is a serious problem especially for the Philippines that sits in the Pacific rim. We are highly vulnerable to sudden changes in weather and climate patterns. The recent spate of super typhoons, the strongest ever to make landfall, has made people widely aware of the climate crisis and the need for disaster prevention and response. The country experiences about 20 typhoons each year. As in any kind of disaster, the poor especially those without secure land tenure, are hit the most; they also take the longest time to recover before the next disaster strikes.

But while the government has been improving the country's disaster prevention and emergency response, there is a general lack of *long-term* planning and response. There is still very little understanding, for example, on the link between disasters and land tenure – even though disasters displace as many as one million people each year – temporarily and permanently. Our land-use planning bill, for instance, has long been pending in Congress for the past 30 years. Land developers continue to build and sell houses in hillsides prone to landslides and erosion. And even after passage of the 1998 Fisheries Code of the Philippines, not a single fisherfolk settlement has been established. Many fisherfolk settlements are located in foreshores and public lands with no security of tenure, facing the constant risk of eviction, and with high vulnerability to winds and sea surges brought about by typhoons.

How do you visualise the post-COVID scenario particularly in relation to land and resource rights of the people globally in general and in Philippines in particular.

Today, some two-thirds of the world's one billion hungry reside in Asia and the Pacific. The COVID pandemic, along with the disruption of food chains and loss of jobs, rising food prices are bringing the spectre of food shortages and undernutrition to millions more. Both rural and urban poor

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<sup>1</sup> [https://angoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Philippine\\_Monitoring\\_Report.pdf](https://angoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Philippine_Monitoring_Report.pdf)

already spend more than half of their income on food. And with an estimated 50% of the population will living in urban areas by 2026, supplying growing cities with adequate and affordable food will be a major challenge, requiring massive investments in food distribution, storage, and marketing facilities.

I really think that COVID-19 pandemic provides us an opportunity to re-think our food production and distribution systems, and to build greater crisis-resilience in our land and food governance systems.

We need to strengthen secure access and control over land and natural resources for small food producers who feed themselves and the world. This as an important step towards mitigating the impact of the current health crisis on their access and control over natural resources and livelihoods. Land rights are vital not only for securing the right to food but also as a social, economic, cultural and spiritual resource, underpinning value and power for rural households.

Yet, there are some real concerns in seeing what is now happening. Under the cover of a COVID-19 emergency, governments have increased the curtailment of civil rights, and have moved to silence media and the opposition. I see this in the Philippines, where our largest broadcasting network ABS-CBN was denied a renewal of a Congressional franchise, undoubtedly because it was critical of the President in the past. Extra-judicial killings continue to be reported in media. And an Anti-Terror bill was passed in 2020, which many see as an attempt to harass and silence critics of the government. The Constitutionality of this law is now being challenged by human rights lawyers in the Supreme Court. There has also been an escalation of harassment against the Left, and an ongoing attempt to change the country's Constitution to remove its nationalist provisions, and to impose full market liberalization in the ownership, use and exploitation of the country's natural resources. Overall, we also see a gradual progression towards dictatorial rule, and an increasing role of the military in the management of government.

If there are any positive developments, I see them more in the voluntary work of ordinary people and institutions. I have seen the growing number of ordinary families who donate their money and time to distribute goods to poor people, and to support medical workers in the frontlines. Many young people have also helped farmers bring their goods to the market. At



this point in time, I just keep my faith in the extra-ordinary possibilities that ordinary people bring.



# NATHANIEL DON MARQUEZ

## Asian NGO Coalition

### Manila, Philippines

*Development paradigm need to be overhauled to put people and communities in the Center.*

ANGOC has been in the forefront of building the civil society movements around Land and other natural resources. Can you share with us, when was ANGOC formed, who were the people behind it and what was the aim? What exactly it does?

Established in 1979 in the framework of and five months preceding the World Conference for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD), ANGOC is a regional association of national and regional networks of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Asia actively engaged in promoting food sovereignty, land and resource rights, smallholder food systems through sustainable agriculture, participatory governance, and rural development. ANGOC member networks and partners work in 10 Asian countries together with 3,000 CSOs and community-based organizations (CBOs). ANGOC actively engages in joint field programs and policy discussions with national governments, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), and international financial institutions (IFIs).

The complexity of Asian realities and diversity of CSOs highlight the need for a development leadership to serve the poor of Asia, ANGOC contributes by providing a forum for articulation of their needs and aspirations as well as expression of Asian values and perspectives.

**When did ANGOC become a member of ILC and how?**

ANGOC is a founding member of ILC. ANGOC was a member of the NGO Working Group that worked with the International Fund for

Agricultural Development in preparation for the International Conference on Hunger and Poverty convened in Brussels in 1995. That conference gave birth to the Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty. ANGOC former Executive Director Antonio “Tony” Quizon was one of the members of the drafting committee that outlined the major thrusts of the Popular Coalition, which years later became ILC.

What do you think the biggest challenge of the land rights movement in Asia region? Are the government's listening to the voices of social movements or we are fast becoming sandwiched between the governments and big corporatised international donor agencies.

The development paradigm needs to be overhauled to put people and communities in the center. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed such weakness of the current model, where land is treated merely as a commodity for profit, ignoring its other dimensions that contribute to food security, resource management, peace, dignity and preservation of culture.

What do you think the biggest asset of the International Land Coalition and how can it be further strengthened?

Its membership. By believing and letting them take the lead.

How long have you been in the voluntary sector? When did you join ANGOC?

32 years in the voluntary sector. I joined ANGOC on 01 October 1993.

Prior to being a member of ANGOC, were you active in the CSOs or student movement? Can you share with us your education and what were the reasons for your joining the civil society movement.

I graduated in Management Engineering. Inspired by my philosophy and theology classes, and the desire to contribute to the cause of social justice pushed me to join the civil society movement immediately after graduation.

I had two jobs prior to ANGOC, both in the NGO sector.

What role do you visualise for yourself as well as for ANGOC in the coming days vis a vis Land Rights movement as well as capacity building of the civil society organisations?

ANGOC shall continue to advocate and strive to become a knowledge centre and effective advocate on land and resource rights. ANGOC and the Land Watch Asia (LWA) campaign shall document and disseminate community empowerment tools and approaches and produce evidence-based research on emerging issues that impact on land rights of communities such as but not limited to climate change.

When did you first participate at the ILC General Assembly? Which GA attracted you the most and why?

I first participated in ILC General Assembly way back in 2003 in Rome, Italy. But I have participated in the succeeding GAs (Bolivia, Entebbe, Kathmandu, Tirana, Antigua, Dakar and Bandung). Different stories for each assembly, so it is difficult to say which attracted me most.



# ROEL RAVANERA

Executive Director, Xavier Science Foundation.

Philippines

*Irony of the world is that it is the food producer who remain  
hungry most of the time.*

Roel Ravanera is the Vice-President for Social Development of Xavier University – Ateneo de Cagayan. XU's Social Development Cluster engages communities and institutions to enable students, faculty, and staff to utilize acquired knowledge to address development issues towards forming men and women of character.

Concurrently, he also serves as the Executive Director of Xavier Science Foundation, a foundation that works closely with Xavier University and other development partners in Northern Mindanao.

Before joining the academy, he worked with NGOs in the Philippines and in the Asian Region. He has spent over 25 years in NGO development work and 15 years in the academe.

How do you look at the Asian Scenario as far as land rights are concerned. Have the governments been responsible in dealing with this issue or do you think that in the new age of pampering the private, the agenda is being cleverly diluted and reframed ?

In a globally liberalized economy, land has become an essential instrument for business corporations to amass wealth and power at the expense of small producers and indigenous communities. Governments have the major responsibility in protecting the land rights of farmers and food producers. Unfortunately, this has not happened. Some even promoted

these investments with the delusion that these would generate employment and reduce rural poverty. Some people never learn.

We had a lot of discussion on the issue of Food Security versus Food Sovereignty. In fact, at many of the ILC forums, this debate remained inclusive as IGOs at one side and social movements on the others. Where do you find yourself in this debate? There is an argument that merely food sovereignty will not ensure the elimination of hunger in the world ? What is your take on this argument?

Who are the poor and hungry in this world? Ironically, they are the food producers who have no full access to their lands, no support from government and if ever they have some products to sell, have no markets. They are also those who have migrated to the urban centres and have come to be known as the urban poor. How then do we move forward? By allowing them to have their freedom of meeting their basic needs. If given the opportunity, they can collaborate, engage and perhaps the world will see less hungry people.

You have been a witness to many things growing including the growth of Land Rights Movement in Asia and then Internationally through your association with ANGOC and then ILC. What was your association with ANGOC and how did it grow in the Asia.

I observed the growth of the Land Rights Movement in Asia as a development worker working in the ANGOC Secretariat. This continued on with ILC but now as a member of the ANGOC Board of Trustees.

You have contributed enormously to the field of developmental research, training material and thought-provoking arguments. How long have you been in the Civil Society Movement and what was the inspiration? Why did you choose this specific subject as a Developmental professional?

I spent over 25 years in NGO development work. I then joined the academe but still focused on social development. The times I spent with farmers and indigenous peoples have inspired me to devote my professional life to development work. I am fortunate to be part of ANGOC and its network. With ANGOC, I realized that I am one with



the many good-hearted professionals who have committed to uphold decent life for all.

International Donors are not interested in supporting the long term initiatives and converting everything into 'project' where you have to give 'successful' report by the end of the year. Knowing fully well that we are fighting against a historical injustice, how superficial are these project based assumptions ?

This is a major challenge for development groups as they need financial resources to survive. Most of the time, the tendency is to follow the donors' agenda while sacrificing the needs of the communities. This has to be reversed. With creativity, development groups should be able to formulate their strategic plan and partner only with donors whose projects are supportive of their long-term agenda. Of course, this is easier said than done.



# LIVIA CELLINI

## Fasting For Food, Rome, Italy

*The current crisis is an opportunity to change priorities and be more constructive*

Livia Cellini works with Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Rome but volunteers for various other social and charitable work. She is part of a charity called Fasting For Food which support grassroots initiatives in different parts of the world. The formation of Fasting for Food is so inspiring and provide us hope for the future as she says, 'Our beautiful adventure started almost 25 years ago. We were some four friends wondering how to give an extra hand and talking about the meaning of fasting. We put the two things together and there came Fasting For Food (FFF). In summary, we skip a meal once a week and donate the amount saved to support small projects across the world. We are now over 70 people, proud of 50 projects supported across the entire world'.

**How did the idea of Fasting For Food came and when did it start ? Who were the people and what was the aim ?**

It was an idea that came to a group of 4 friends including me on the occasion of World Food Day 1998. The Pope John Paul II came to FAO on that occasion and launched a one day fasting. So with a few friends we started thinking how to take the invite and make it more personal, lasting and meaningful. And this is how we created Fasting For Food, at the beginning only 4 friends skipping one meal a week and setting the symbolic 5 Euros aside now over 70 people. In these 20 years and more we have supported almost 50 projects all over the world initially with little funds now with much more and up to 5 projects for each biennium.

How have you helped the organisations ? Can you share some of your experiences in this regard ?

After the first few years I became the coordinator and a very motivated motor. I believe FFF gave more to me than to the projects. It's one of the few things that keeps me hopeful and aware of the amazing power and beauty when people connect with each other. I am attaching the list of projects supported so you can have a better idea of what we have done so far.

How long have you been working with FAO ? Was it your first assignment?

I have been working in FAO for almost 30 years now, first in a little task force to process admin documents now in the overall planning of FAO conferences in HQs and in the Field offices.

Have you also worked with NGOs or CSOs or political movements prior to joining the UN ?

I have done voluntary work with Amnesty, ecological movements and also with an Association working with prisoned mothers and babies.

What have been your experiences of working with FAO ? How do you look at the growing poverty and our responses ?

I am very proud of working for the UN. Surely the work at HQs is very administrative and far from the people we work for and probably that has given me such a strong push to do something that could bring me closer to the people and to the results. The importance of FAO, beyond building technical knowledge in the various fields of Agriculture, Animal health and farming, Forestry, Fishing Climate Change and environmental sustainability is also a very important platform where governments and stakeholders can get together and discuss and build political agreements and economical impacts.

How are the approaches and attitudes UN bodies and intergovernmental organisation different from those from civil society organisations and social movements. Are they complimentary or contradictory?

I believe they are complementary and I have seen this growing in the past years in FAO. In some way this seems to bring politics closer to the people giving a place and opportunity for discussion and hopefully constructive dialogue. I think of the growing attention now given to the Indigenous Peoples and others.

This is a very traumatic time for Italy. The Covid 19 assault has hurt Italy the most. What do you think are the lessons out of this crisis ?

I am definitively no expert in economics or politics, I am a psychologist. I do hope this crisis will give our leaders the opportunity to change priorities, be more constructive while looking at the bigger picture and thinking of the world we wish to leave to our grandchildren. Surely the number of people who are impacted by the virus in their work and life is enormous and this covers people from all backgrounds. Even this enormous change from physical to smart working is impacting an enormous part of the working world who lived on different servicing jobs. And there is a lot of worry because we are all fearing a second wave of the virus in the Fall and that really would be a disaster.

You have been very passionate about environmental protection and our traditional value system. Do you think that the current crisis will make people more concerned about the issues such as climate change and protecting the bio diversity.

I keep trying to be positive and optimistic and I know who was sensitive before is more sensitive now. Unfortunately, we need a massive turn in awareness and responsibility and we don't seem to be there yet.. and as you know better than I do our life is not sustainable for all..

Many of the responses to the current crisis seems to be market oriented particularly for societies where a majority of people don't have two time meals. Are the doctors these days only providing market and profit oriented solutions to the people and not really those ideas where people can do at their own. I mean, how many of the people can afford to have running water, hand sanitisers ( now a popular word in India) as well as washing of soap every now and then. Can't there be some indigenous ideas which are not expensive and can be as good as these commercial things ?

I wish we had wiser leaders that could get together for the interest of humanity and elaborate a long term and reliable vision and plan protecting the weakest and inspiring those who have it all but don't understand the impact of their lifestyle.

Where do you hail from ? How different is life now with that when you were growing in your native city or town ?

I was born and raised in Rome, I come from a privileged family but my mother was always involved in helping those more in need and my father travelled a lot for work so probably my upbringing drew my heart and my life to the place I am now and I was lucky enough to see further and develop my own personal way and project! Rome was once easy, clean and people were surely more human, respectful and responsible towards each other. Surely this is not only a problem of Rome but people seem to think only for themselves and the impact is visible and sad. But then again Rome and Italy are still very beautiful and beauty in places and people is always there for us to see and build upon..

How did aspirations and ambitions grew during your young age. I mean, you joined FAO. Was it that you wanted to join the UN or CSOs or was it just because you got it ?

I had my first baby when I was very young and still studying so I started working with the idea it would be for a few months only. Then I was lucky enough to stay and grow and I am very grateful for this opportunity which has surely broadened my mind and view of the world.

How do you visualise yourself ten years from now ? What would you be doing once you come out of FAO ?

I see myself away from the crowd for sure possibly very close to nature and doing some voluntary work but I am not yet sure in what form.

You might have come across many places and communities during your tenure here. Can you share with us some positive learning stories which can be inspiring for others?

The diversity of the projects and the richness of the people fills my heart always, I am actually working at a little book to tell the stories of the people

and of the projects supported across all these years. If you want to have a skype call and want to know a bit more of any of the projects in the list I can be very passionate!





# LUCIA ANGELUCCI,

Rome, Italy

*Democracy can not flourish in contradiction with socialism*

Lucia Angelucci retired after working with International Land Coalition from the very beginning. Though her work was to ensure logistics and other management issues for the organising various international events of the International Land Coalition and she did it with great conviction and effectiveness. Lucia Angelucci was kind enough to respond to various questions that I raised with her which provide glimpse of her personality. Her working experience is very diversified, spanning from baby sitting to kitchen helper in restaurants, watch maker, office helper, office clerk, journalist, secretary, administrative assistant. Her specific skills are: good event organiser, accurate keeper of expense records, good attitude for problem solving and at interpersonal exchange, good ability to interact with people of different countries and culture, open mind and personal empathy.

When did you join ILC and how

I cannot say that I formally joined ILC, but I can say that I was part of the group that led to the creation of what later became the ILC. In 1995, a conference was held in Brussels, organised by IFAD and supported by the EU, WB, FAO, WFP, on the big themes linked to agricultural issues, among which agrarian reform. The conference generated a Plan of Action to form an alliance of intergovernmental agencies, non-governmental and grassroots organizations called The Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty. The Popular Coalition, hosted by IFAD and initially led by a group of IFAD Officials, nominated, in 1998, a Coordinator, Bruce H. Moore, and I was appointed as his Secretary. In 2003, the Popular Coalition changed its name in International Land Coalition, with Bruce H.

Moore as its first Director. I have worked for the ILC ever since, as a Secretary first, as an Administrative Assistant later and until my retirement age, in November 2013.

### **What has been your educational and family background**

I was born in 1951, in a poor peasant family in a small rural village in the centre/sud of Italy. We did not have enough land to live on, so my father was doing other jobs to sustain the family, like working in stone quarries, selling vegetables on village markets, for a period migrated to Germany, while the rest of the family was cultivating the little land we had. We were in the years after the second world war and life was difficult for everybody, especially in small towns or country villages. I was the second of four children and our greatest asset was that we were very good at school. This made our teachers approach our parents and convince them to give us school education. It was a big burden on my parents but they did not spare themselves and managed to send my older brother and myself to university. My older brother graduated in medicine and is an eye-doctor, I graduated in foreign languages, while the third and fourth children preferred to abandon university and started working.

My university career, though, has not been an even one: I could barely stand the sacrifices my family was going through to keep us at the university, so I decided to do odd jobs while studying, like baby-sitting, working in offices as administrative clerk, going abroad to improve the knowledge of the languages I was studying (Germany, USA, Great Britain), always working and maintaining myself. Finally, I settled in Rome in 1984 and started working at IFAD first on a temporary basis, later, in 1991, on a fixed-term basis after having won a position as administrative secretary. In 1990, while working at IFAD, I graduated at the university of Rome.

### **What was the best moment and events that you can remember as being in the Coalition**

Working for the ILC has always been very motivating and gratifying for me. Having the opportunity to meet and know so many people from different parts of the world widened my intellectual perspective and contributed immensely to my personal growth. Surely, the best events for me were the Assemblies of Members, that which I contributed to

organising in the various countries (Bolivia, Kenya, Nepal, Albania, Guatemala). As I was responsible for all the logistics of the meetings, I went to those countries earlier and for longer periods than my other colleagues. This gave me the chance to know first-hand the realities and the countries I was visiting. It was not a tourist-like visit, because on those occasions I had the necessity to deal with different people at various level, thus developing a relationship that was of mutual trust – business-based at first, slowly becoming a human relationship. On those occasions, I also had the opportunity to consolidate the relationship with members, with some of them a friendship that remains still alive, as in the case with Vidya Bhushan Rawat from SDF – Social Development Foundation from India. I will never forget the evenings spent, after long days of work behind the scene, speaking and chatting with people on the different themes of life, making real exchanges of our different interests and way of living.

**You were the force behind the Coalition, helping us through your round-the-clock services. What impressed you the best as a Coalition?**

The organization of Assemblies and other institutional meetings of the ILC was very demanding because it meant facilitating the travel of the members from their own countries to the specific country where the events were taking place. That implied several difficulties to overcome, like, for example, helping people getting their entry visa not only to the country of the event but also for the countries of transit when travelling by plane. That also implied accommodating people possibly in the same hotel, “forcing” them to share accommodation at times with people they knew very little or nothing at all. What impressed me was the readiness and willingness of people to accept and comply with those requests, including the fatigue of going through travels that more often than not were very long and tiring. I found that those difficulties were undergone and accepted because those people were very motivated, they really believed in and trusted the scope and goals of the Coalition. They felt part and proud of being Coalition Members.

**What were the things which you did as you were supposed to but you felt things would have been better the other way round.**

Honestly, I think that very few things could have been done differently than how they were actually done. Considering, obviously, only my field

of work. I believe that one of my most positive capabilities was the lack of pre-established, constricting schemes of mind, as these can, at times, create dead-end roads. I always approached a new reality or event with a free mind, open to confront each time a difficulty arose without a pre-set frame, so that that difficulty could be overcome and solved positively, possibly in a naïf attitude at first, but that gave, in the end, good results. Was that too naïf, on my part? I leave the answer to the people I worked for.

### **What have been your engagements after retirement?**

In my retirement life I have gone back to my origins. I've bought a piece of land and I'm cultivating it. Yes, I've gone back to being a peasant: I grow my vegetables, I produce my olive oil, I follow the rhythm of the seasons. Needless to say, I'm not self-sufficient, because the piece of land is not so big, I'm by myself and I'm growing old. This means that my strength is not as it was when I was younger, but this simple life suits me fine. I'm away from the hustle-bustle of the big town, I can manage my time as I want, I'm meeting new people and making new friends, accepting the new challenges this "new" life poses on me.

### **Which was the toughest event among the general assemblies and why?**

In my life in the Coalition, being the organiser of logistics, I had quite a few tough occasions to confront. One was the organization of dialysis for a member coming to Bolivia from a Caraïbic country. The guy was suffering from serious kidney disease and had to undergo dialysis every other day. After a couple of days, we had to send him back to his country: he could not really attend the various meetings the Assembly demanded, but I was touched by his intention of being part of the event, notwithstanding his health problems. But the most tense episode was the one that occurred in Guatemala. I had organised transportation for members to go to the field visit, way out in the countryside. After about one hour after the participants had left, one of my colleagues called me in panic, because the brakes of the bus he and his group were on broke and ahead of them there was a steep stretch of the road that was crossing a river! Bravely, the driver was able to reduce the speed and the bus slowed down to stop right at the entrance of the bridge. But the bus was not safe anymore to drive on and the visit had to continue, so I had to organise in

a rush a replacement bus to go and relieve the group. It ended well, but we had a good three hours of panic first and tension for the whole day.

**What among the Coalition members you found were the best traits and what made you upset if there was anything?**

The membership of the ILC is very broad, different experiences, different realities, different identities, but a common trait, among the non-governmental and civil society organizations, is the complete dedication and faith to their values and objectives. I found really impressive the courage, especially in the organizations that are more involved at field level with the communities they represent, to fight against injustice and for their revendication, sometimes putting their own lives at risk. I felt a real pride in witnessing their achievements, especially when the struggle had been very tough and long-lasting. The feeling of having been of support and at their service, in the little, marginal area of my work, has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my years of service in the ILC, and still does. Equally, it was frustrating when the efforts put in place in some critical situations did not work out.

**Any other point which you would like to explain**

Working at ILC has been a unique, fortunate experience. In my fourteen years of work in a UN Organization I had the occasion of knowing people from all over the world. Such a rich environment has been fundamental in widening my horizon and my perception of the world itself. When I could meet personally the people we, at ILC, were working for, I kind of fulfilled a profound desire of mine: meet people of different culture, language, social status, without any filter, a first-hand experience. There I was, speaking directly with each and any of the persons I would have had otherwise only a working relationship with, on an open-mind basis, eager to know and to learn from each and any of them. And, at the end of the day, I regret only that I am not able any more to continue doing that, but the values and feelings all this has created inside me are still there, intact. I am perfectly aware that I cannot keep the ties as tight any more (distance, age), the communication becomes, with time, occasional and sparse, but I will never forget all you people (some of you are nearer than others, but this is only due to the difficulty of the means, not of the heart!) Thank you for having crossed the path of my life!

## Why so many deaths in Italy due to Covid ?

The reason of the so many deaths in Italy, especially in Lombardy. This is one of the most economically strong regions in Italy and travel across countries is ever so frequent, abroad as well as in-country. Commerce exchange is basic in the nowadays global economy, and China is a well-in-fashion market. I am not sure but a safe guess is that representatives of the region companies have travelled to China all year round in 2019 and until February of this year, until closure of the air traffic. It could very well be that the virus has been travelling with those people before everybody were aware of the upcoming pandemics and they have unconsciously spread it everywhere. The other factor is that the majority of the deaths were in the elderly population, and mainly accommodated in rest house care. Now, these facilities host elderly people who do not have a family behind that can take good care of them, because the adults are working and have their own family to take care of and not enough space nor time to look after also to old relatives. Those rest houses are mainly privatised and private business, as we all know very well, look after profit more than quality service. The protocol for safeguard from the virus has not been applied quickly enough nor rigorously, thus creating so many casualties.

The other huge factor of the high number of casualties was also, as you suggest, the not preparedness for such a wide and quickly spreading pandemic. For sure that demonstrates the failure of the health system but, in all honesty, a pandemic, for its very nature, is an unexpected event and no system is planned around a possible pandemic. Sure, the validity of an health system is judged on the quickness and efficiency of the response to an event of great magnitude, and here we experience the failure of a State. Yes, I do agree that more importance has been given to the privatisation of basic services that a State, by definition, should provide to its citizens, but we are talking, in Europe at least, of capitalist countries, not socialist: profit is the verb, not community wellbeing. I believe that a new vision is needed, a new philosophy of politics. Democracy, which I value most, should not be in contradiction with Socialism, but a new kind of socialism is also needed. A society should be organised around centrally managed basic services to all its components, and Economics should have a more human character: profit is the main impulse to the creation of work, but profit should not be a greedy god, as also in this period we can witness.

## How have people been affected by COVID ?

Well, a more cautious attitude has become a normal behavior, accepted by the majority of the population, but, after two and a half months tiredness is presenting its claim: we Italians are a very instinctual people, we love hugs, handshakes, kisses, chats, conviviality. This forced quarantine is trying many people. The impossibility of doing all this is creating subtle rebellion and discontent. The government has acted, in my view, in the best possible way, given the political situation (not certainly very strong). The political opposition, led by irresponsible forces, has been speculating rumorously on the growing intolerance of the lockdown, making pressure on the government to loosen up the measures. We will see in about one week from now if the virus is spreading again or if it is really receding. Old people were the most affected, because they are more exposed to any kind of flu and surely they have become more sensitive to the isolation. But the net of solidarity has functioned well enough, especially in towns. People have organised themselves in making and delivering the shopping to the doors of old people, grandparents have learned how to use the new technologies so they have made video chats with their relatives and families, artists have organised video sessions on TV, museums have organised video tours, free for all, local governments have distributed food to the poorest on their territory, according to the government instructions.

Obviously, I have also suffered from being separated from my son and my friends, but I have accepted the lockdown with patience and goodwill, aware that the distance and caution were the only weapons we could use against the pandemic. It is becoming better now, but I was also very lucky in living in the countryside, in an open and healthy environment. Here the separation was not so hard to bear, because we are few people living in this area, the distance between each other was easy to maintain still keeping each other good company.





# RAJ MOHAN

Poet, Lyricist and Sarnami Singer,  
The Netherlands

*Countries which 'developed' 'indentured labour' in the 19<sup>th</sup> and  
20<sup>th</sup> century need to apologise for the crime against humanity*

Raj Mohan is an extremely popular Sarnami Singer originally hailed from Suriname but now based in The Netherlands. His story is important because he belonged to a family of indentured labours whose family was taken to Suriname by the Dutch Colonialists in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 'concept' of indentured labour began as soon as Slavery was 'abolished' 'officially' as the big farmland in various islands of the colonial masters required poorly paid labours and hence most of these agricultural labours came from India and other colonies. This aspect of slavery must be investigated as crime against humanity when people lost everything including their 'voice'. Raj Mohan is an example of how despite worst form of oppression, how communities preserved their culture and language in an alien world.

This is the 145th year since your ancestors were transported to far away European colonies in the Caribbeans where they already had the people exported as slaves from African region. Was the Contract Labour work just as a slavery or better than them as technically slavery had been abolished by then in the United States ?

Contract work was certainly a new form of slavery. Taken by the British. After the abolition of slavery, Europeans needed cheap labour to do the work of the former slaves. Moreover, they needed farmers who had knowledge of sugar cane farming.

For Dutch contract labour you cannot really speak of a new form of slavery but rather of a disguised form of it.

An important difference between the Netherlands and the other European contract labour was that most workers left for Suriname on their own free will, at least 80%. Watch the documentary: How Britain re-invented slavery<sup>1</sup>

Which generation person are you in your family who were taken to Suriname? Can you give a bit detail of your grandparents or great grandparents who first went as Girmitiya mazdoor. What was their social, cultural caste and geographical location?

I'm the 4th generation. My maternal ancestors: left India in 1894 from district Saran, village Mangalpur in the state of Bihar. They belonged to Kurmi community.

My paternal ancestors left India in 1908 from district Basti, village : Sarnagi, in Uttar Pradesh and belonged to Chamar community.

Most of the countries where the NRIs are now living have severe caste prejudices. US, UK and Canada have a huge Indian diaspora but caste system among the Indians is prevalent. What is the condition of those who migrated as slave labour. Did they too have their own caste prejudices among them or they forgot it ?

Caste system does not exist for at least 50 years at us. But there's still discrimination between the The Hindu's of Sanatan Dharma and Arya Samaaj. And some Brahman families still feel that they belong to the upper cast. You will find the backwardness over here in some extend. But very less.

When and why did you migrate to Netherlands and why ? What were your parents doing ?

I migrated in 1974 due to divorce of my parents. My mother left my father for personal reasons. She raised us.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://youtu.be/3Cncg3yhWPI>

Netherlands and many other European countries have deep linguistic nationalism. They definitely lack cultural and religious diversity unlike the UK. How did you explore your cultural roots in the Netherlands ? What was the inspiration ?

I discovered at the age of 16 that we had no pop songs (balads) and songs such as geet & ghazal in our Sarnami-Bhojpuri language. During my vocal training in Indian music in Amsterdam, I started to develop songs such as geet & ghazals, pop songs and other modern styles.

In terms of education, what did you study ? Did you ever miss the absence of Indian cultural values in your education ?

I did high school, after that I started private lesson in Indian vocal music in Amsterdam with my guru Ustad Jamaluddin Bhartiya. No, I didn't miss the absence of Indian cultural values in my education because at home we lived our Hindustani culture. Like: speaking Bhojpuri, our food, Bollywood music and our folk music 'Baithak gana' and traditional marriages, mundan sanskaar and Hindu festivals like Holi and Diwali.

I have been regularly speaking to the migrants from India during the freedom struggle, particularly in the UK. The migrants who belonged to Dalit communities and the common feeling among them was that they came out of the hell which they described Indian villages, drenched in the caste system and discrimination against the Dalits. You crave for villages in India, tracked your roots while many of those who still suffer from age old caste system want to get out of these villages terming them 'hell'. How do you respond to it ?

I think, unfortunately India will take at least 100 more years to get equal right for all citizens by getting rid of the caste system and discrimination based on religion. The upper cast (the zamindars), who oppressed our ancestors too are still in power and they will not give it away unless the people of India (in common) and women fights strongly for their rights and equality.

Caribbean and Calypso always fascinated India. Watching the West Indian cricketers playing extraordinary game was always a treat. Somewhere in our heart we felt this is team responding to the white

supremacy that yes, blacks have merit and they can be ruthless in their game. Did the game of cricket ever attract you during those days in your part of the world? Do you have relations with migrant Indians in other countries in the Caribbean?

Cricket did not attract me for football (soccer) was popular in Suriname, except in district Nickerie where cricket was and still is popular, but only with the Indians not the blacks.

I don't really have relation in other countries in the Caribbean accept professionally.

When did you start your professional career as an artist in Sarnami singing ? What was your first album? How was it responded by the people ? How many songs and albums have been our so far ?

I started writing songs and poems in Sarnami from the year 2003. Soon I performed my Sarnami-Bhojpuri songs.

My first album was released in 1998: 'Kaale baadal' (geet & Ghazals), 2<sup>nd</sup> was in 2005: 'Kanktráki' (Sarnami-Bhojpuri) The respond of peoal was very good and even better when I released 'Kanktráki' in my own mother tongue. 5 album so far. (3) 'Krishan Murari mere' (with Shri Anup Jalota, bhajans), (4) 'Daayra' (pop album), (5) 'Dui mutthi' (4 songs in Sarnami-Bhojpuri about our Girmitiya history).

You have been now live performing in various parts of the world. When was your first show ? Do you sing in Sarnami-Bhojpuri or popular Hindi too attract you.

My first performance was in 1985 in Rotterdam (The Netherlands). I sing Sarnami-Bhojpuri, Urdu and Hindi.

You write your own lyrics or also sing for others?

Occasionally I sing for others like in the Bhojpuri movie 'Papihara' (yet to be released)

Your song ' Saat Samandar paar lejaaike, gathari me baandh ke aasha' brings tears. It is a phenomenal song, gives us the background of your

ancestors and how they went to Suriname. Is it your own writing ? How did the idea come ?

This song is indeed my own song. I wrote it in 2002. The idea came with the other songs which I wanted to write/create in my mother tongue. I missed (and still miss) balads (modern songs) with themes about our culture and history. Themes like: our history, love songs, bidaai songs and so on...

Now I have all these songs and I get respect and admiration from all over the world. Not only from Bhojpuri speaking audience but also from Hindi speakers and non-Indians like the Dutch in The Netherlands and the blacks (Creole) from Suriname.

How do you respond to growing vulgarisation of the Bhojpuri music and videos in India where women are just presented as an object ? I mean listening to your soulful voice and many other songs like 'raat sapna dikhaaye piya humko, raat sapna', I am sure the people must have responded to these videos in full. Is it the pressure from the market or money which is predominantly in the hands of men here that Bhojpuri music and lyrics have become synonymous to absurdity and vulgarity. Do you have similar pressure ? If yes then how do you deal with it.

The pressure is not created by the market; the market is created by business people who don't care about art and culture but who are only focused on making money quickly and as much as possible. They are therefore able to cross all borders. Of course this happens also in our community but not in such large scale. I never felt that pressure of creating vulgar songs. Therefore, I love my culture too much. Besides that, I always wanted to make the difference with my art and I wanted to give beautiful Bhojpuri songs to the world.

When did you first come to India and where was it ? How did you trace your ancestral place. How was the feeling. Were you able to get in touch with relatives of your parents and grandparents?

I first went to India in 1986 to study music at my teacher's in Bombay.

It was overwhelming. It was as if for the first time (I was then 24 years old) I came to my 'own' country, with my 'own' people. I was born in a multicultural country where I always have been treated as a migrant. It

counts also for The Netherlands where I live for 45 years now. It is in India only where I don't have that feeling. I found my ancestors through a digital database which is online. I have been in the states UP and Bihar, the areas of my ancestors but not yet to the specific villages. I intend to do that soon. I have no hope of finding family, but you never know...

You are a regular performer at Lokrang, a festival dedicated to folk art in India. Folk artists are still low paid and not become 'star' like the Bombay's illusive world as they don't sell illusion. Shouldn't the folk artists too get their fair share now in terms of acceptance and acknowledgement?

Artist who perform folk art don't have to bare difficult studies. You learn it at home or on the streets. Even though it can be tough, still it's seldom art you learn at conservatories or universities. That's why only few artists are able to level up with artist like from Bollywood. Actually, they should get the recognition just as pop artists who also often learn their skills at home. I do agree that it's not fair but on the other hand, I can imagine why it's not happening. For example: if someone who's very good in lok geet asked to perform a classical ghazal will be extremely difficult but a well-trained ghazal singer will be able to sing a folk song without much difficulties.

Classical music and art was brahmanical domination in India. Folk culture was basically of the Bahujan communities but it looks that over the period of time brahmanical brains actually changed a lot of content. The resistance against the prejudices, discrimination based on caste and gender have been sidelined and more we hear in the folk is a valorisation of the machoism as well as romanticisation of our social system and rituals. Don't you think that we need a fusion of tradition versus modernity. I mean, folk culture can't be allowed to degrade women, widows, single women, disabled, Dalits. Republican values of equality, liberty and fraternity must form part of it. What is your opinion ?

For the brahmins, it was very important to show and retain their power by suppressing others and keeping them away from education. This naturally also applied to classical music.

But they are also very good business people. If folk culture sells well then they make it their own. Just look at the popular artists in UP and Bihar. It is often people from these upper caste who have made our beautiful music and dance and movies, vulgar. I don't need to mention names, I think. But our culture is not vulgar, these people's minds are vulgar!

At the same time they sing our folk songs; as if it is their pain. While they have been the cause of the pain. They take everything!

Off course it's important that folk culture and old traditions which discriminates groups and people as mentioned above. But for that we need education and discussion through-out the whole country in all layers of the population. The upper casts should be educated too. They should realize that it's backward to think in cast systems and that is' not OK to discriminate.

This does not happen overnight.

Tell us about your family. How do they see your passion for Sarnami values and culture ?

My family is very proud of what I'm doing and the respect which I get for my art over the world. We are/were with 5 brother (1 expired in 2019), 2 sisters and my mother. She divorced my father when I was only 10 years old. She raised us. My father expired 30 years back.

What are your future plans ? Do you plan any film on Girmitiya issue to highlight their pains and agony, their sacrifices and need to protect their interest.

I will certainly continue to do my best in the future to sing and write about the pain and sorrow of the Girmitiyas. Their / our story has not yet been fully heard. I also appeal to the Indian local and central government to contribute to this. I will always keep telling our story.

I was appointed Adjunct Professor at Mahatma Gandhi Central University Bihar (Motihari) in December 2019. I see it as my task to pay as much attention as possible to Girmitiya art, culture, history and developments. In December 2020 I'm coordinating a 2-day International Diaspora Conference at MGCUB.

My final question. Every society has its own problems. We had caste based discrimination, western societies had racism and it is still there. There is an acknowledgement of having wronged the blacks and hence there are memorials and many of the Western government have openly admitted their faults and apologised. Has there been any demand from the Girmitiya families or their relatives towards their colonial government to apologise what they did to their ancestors. Shouldn't there be a museum like the holocaust museum and other museum so that today's generation can know how people were discriminated and how the colonialism, casteism and racism have degraded humanity.

I think it is important that the governments of the countries that have used Indentured labour from the 19th and early 20th centuries should apologize. Certainly the British and the French. But the Dutch Indentured labourers were also cruel. Even though at that time most Girmitiyas / Kantrakis of Suriname voluntarily left India in search of a better life. The system was inhumane and the Dutch have behaved inhumane.

I speak out this wish that the awareness about our shared history will increase among Indians all over the world and amongst the British, Dutch and the French. Actually, the whole world should know about this blind spot in our history.

Wish you all the best my dear brother.



# DANIEL M KOBEL

Executive Director

Ogiek Peoples' Development Program(OPDP), KENYA

*Free Prior Informed Consent ( FPIC) can be the biggest tool to protect indigenous people's right to protect their natural resources.*

Daniel grew up in the deep forest of Mau where school-going was a challenge but managed to cross the valleys and the flooded rivers of Mau attended Sogoo Primary School in 1978 to 1985, joined a day school Secondary, Nyanturango in Kisii from 1985 to 1989 , he managed to join DAVV University (Former University of Indore )at Islamic College in Indore Madya Pradesh(M.P), 1990 to 1993, left India in 1994 with Bachelor of Commerce degree. In 1994 he started the Ogiek community movement and later got employed with the Government of Kenya for two years and later got employed in Egerton University, proceeded to the Netherlands for postgraduate diploma under NUFFIC scholarship in Maastricht School of Management (MSM), the Netherlands. In 2010 he graduated with Master of Business Administration (MBA), Strategic Management, Egerton University, Kenya. Parallel to all my academic and trainings, he got involved in Human rights, Land rights and Environmental rights which I have done passionately till today.

Is land reform an issue in Kenya? Why in your opinion is land reform in Kenya needed and what has the government been doing since independence?

Before the colonial rule, communities in Kenya had their leadership structures that administered land rights among their members for purposes of activities such as the construction of shelter, farming, grazing, hunting, and gathering. Communities lived in harmony and the occasional fights

over territorial claims were resolved by panels of elders. The colonial government not only imposed alien land tenure relations but also introduced conceptual, legal, and sociological confusion in traditional tenure systems. This led to far-reaching disruption of the African customary land tenure system and laws.

The analysis of the conflict dimension of land issues is fundamental to the understanding of triggers and vehicles of reform processes in Kenya, both constitutional reform and governance reform. Land disputes have been the basis of institutional processes that led to the formation of many commissions of enquiry appointed by the Kenya presidents in the 1990s and 2000s.

From 2000 to 2010, the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission<sup>1</sup> (CKRC) worked on the drafting of a new supreme law. Land reform was one of the pillars of the proposed constitutional changes.

The proposed law gave an opportunity for a whole chapter on land, since the deliberation of the National Land Policy<sup>2</sup> parallel to the ministry of lands and planning in 2004 unravel the land question and general policy on land.

The historical land injustices are essential to the understanding of the land issue in Kenya from the colonial regime to the present independent government regimes.

The appointment of the Njonjo Commission<sup>3</sup> in the 1990s to investigate the causes of conflict arising from the local arena.

The Ndungu Commission<sup>4</sup> which was named after the chairperson of the commission in 2002 to investigate fraudulent land allocations, established

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<sup>1</sup> <http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/CommissionReports/The-Final-Report-of-the-Constitution-of-Kenya-Review-Commission-2005.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://landportal.org/library/resources/lex-faoc163862/national-land-policy-sessional-paper-no-3-2009>

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Njonjo\\_Land\\_Commission](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Njonjo_Land_Commission)

<sup>4</sup> [https://mokoro.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/ndungu\\_report\\_land\\_and\\_graft\\_in\\_kenya1.pdf](https://mokoro.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/ndungu_report_land_and_graft_in_kenya1.pdf)

a report showing the use of power in the land administration and political excessive power in land acquisition.

The formation of the Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission<sup>5</sup> (TJRC) in 2009 after the post-election violence in 2007-2008 was meant to redress historical land injustices among the other violations.

The promulgation of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 led to the successive formation of the National Land Commission (NLC) as one of its progressive elements which was tasked to investigate, hear and recommend historical land injustices as one of its functions. The NLC Act was created in conjunction with two other land laws i.e., the land registration Act and the Land Act<sup>6</sup>.

The Community Land Act of 2016<sup>7</sup>. Providing for, first, the recognition, protection, and registration of community land rights. Second, the management and administration of community land. Third, the role of county governments in relation to unregistered community land and related matters.

Importance of land reform in Kenya.

- To address historical land injustices that have been a source of conflict among minority and marginalized groups in Kenya.
- To enhance equal distribution of resources for production among the ethnic minorities communities in Kenya.
- To curb issues of irregular allocations and grabbing of land to those who are well connected by political means and power.
- To resolve or prevent an economic, social, or political crisis

**What is the number of landless people in Kenya? Which communities they belong to and how do they survive in the absence of land?**

Section 40 of the Constitution of Kenya stipulates that every person has the right to own land of any description in any part of Kenya. The

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.knchr.org/Portals/0/Transitional%20Justice/kenya-tjrc-summary-report-aug-2013.pdf?ver=2018-06-08-100202-027>

<sup>6</sup> <https://landcommission.go.ke/media/erp/upload/landact6of2012.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://landcommission.go.ke/media/erp/upload/communitylandact27of2016.pdf>

population of Kenya consists of about 43% of youth who are landless depending on land either from inheritance or purchase. This also involves the hunter-gatherer communities that have been evicted from their ancestral land by the government in the name of conservation. Land tenure is the root challenge for these communities as most of their reserves were termed as protected areas.

Those who don't have access to land lease, rent, or leave on the streets as home.

So far we don't have accurate data of the number of landless people but considering the poverty rate in the country, it has lots of connectivity with land as most people in Kenya depend on Agriculture for their livelihood.

**Is there any government criteria for defining what is landlessness, who are middle farmers, and who are called big farmers?**

Yes, this was a result of recommendations of National Land Policy 2009 that called for equitable access to land for beneficial use and occupation for all Kenyans in the face of reported skewed land distribution with a guinea coefficient of 0.77. As a result, many people are landless while few own large tracts of land which is sometimes unutilized.

The acreage held by an individual farmer is what qualifies to be a big farmer or a smallholder farmer. In Kenya, those big farms are controlled by well-connected persons and the ability to grab the land as a resource.

**Is there any upper limit of acquiring land? I mean can a person own as much land as they can or are there laws of the land ceiling?**

In Kenya, no law has been passed to regulate land holding maximum or minimum. Only this applies in cities, municipalities, and towns. A commentary bill<sup>8</sup> is yet to be passed on this. In Kenya, there are families owning land which is equivalent to two to three Counties combined. In other words you can own as per your ability to buy or dispossessing people in whichever way.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://mulenwa.wordpress.com/2015/10/13/commentary-on-the-minimum-and-maximum-land-holding-bill/>

**Who are the big farmers in your country and what is their political and social impact?**

Although the promulgations of the new constitution of Kenya opened gates and hope for many Kenyans, the National Land Policy did not work as anticipated with instruments such as the National Land Commission. These institutions are driven by political waves and make politically motivated decisions. Hence these big farmers have an impact on policies because nearly all of them are politicians. They also determine prices farm product like Tea, Coffee, Rice , Maize etc

**Who will you put as land grabbers in Kenya? Big landlords, international companies, or Indian companies and individuals?**

In Kenya the main land grabbers are politicians and some international companies, owning Tea plantations, Sisal farms, and most of the companies have connection with political elites.

Land grabbing in Kenya has significantly led to disputes and conflicts. The colonial administration was one of the causes of displacement in Kenya to create highlands for the white settlers. The politicians, government officials including surveyors and the wealthier people are the perpetrators of land loss among the minority and marginalized groups in Kenya. Those who suffered most are Indigenous Peoples especially the hunter-gatherer group

**You have been working with Indigenous People and their rights. You won a big case for the rights of the indigenous people. Is the order of the court implemented? If not then why?**

On May 26, 2017, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (the "African Court") delivered a long-awaited judgment on a case brought before it by Ogiek Peoples against the Kenyan government for consistent violations and denial of their land rights.

The government since the landmark ruling has formed taskforces regarding the implementation of the case. In 2018 a task force<sup>9</sup> was formed to study and implement the ruling though it didn't have Ogiek

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<sup>9</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/kenya/kenyan-government-task-force-implement-african-court-s-ogiek-judgment-deeply-flawed-mrg>

representatives to hear the wishes of the community, the report of the task force has never been publicized despite a call by the community.

The reparations case that has been ongoing has been postponed by the government of Kenya using the Covid-19 as a justification for this. In fact, amidst the pandemic, the government went ahead evicting<sup>10</sup> the community without Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). Lack of political goodwill is a challenge for the implementation of the Ogiek ruling.

In a nutshell, the government do not want to implement the Ogiek case as they are using climate change issues that Ogiek are going to destroy the forest, forgetting the fact Ogiek have remained the true custodian of Mau forest complex, a place the call home not a forest. Forested land in Mau is Ogiek home over generation.

**You have campaigned for Free Prior Informed consent in your country. Why is it essential? Is it flawless or do you wish that people have a right to say no to any project?**

The FPIC protocol is a tool that will be useful to the Ogiek community and other indigenous communities as a baseline to control their natural resources and have participated at the ground level in project development.

Indigenous people's biodiversity is an aspect that requires consultation in development. The indigenous people control the highest percentage of biodiversity in conservation hence extraction of these resources requires consultation. For instance, eviction should be done with full consultation of the community. Therefore, the community has a right to say YES or NO to a given project.

**Who are the indigenous people in your country. How are they placed and is there a political conflict as many people claim indigenous people theory was propounded by Europeans for their own political purposes. Nobody asks these questions of indigenous people in Europe?**

They have distinct social, economic, or political systems. They have also a distinct language, culture, and beliefs and they are marginalized and discriminated against by the state. The indigenous peoples have a special

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<sup>10</sup> <https://minorityrights.org/2020/07/17/ogiek-evictions/>

connection with the land and biodiversity. They possess crucial knowledge about how to manage natural resources sustainably and act as guardians or custodians of the land for the next generation. Losing their land means a loss of identity.

This population has faced historical marginalization for decades and through their redress of these injustices to the domestic mechanisms they have never been heard. For this reason, they are forced to seek from international justice institutions.

The other communities have persistently denied that they are not indigenous despite African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights declared some communities e.g Ogiek, Endorois, Maasai, Turkana, Awer, Elmolo, Pokots, Borana etc who are mainly Pastoralist and hunter-gatherer communities as Indigenous as per Article 260 of Kenyan Constitution.

**Is there any law for land rights in your country that can be termed as a model and replicated elsewhere?**

Yes, the Community Land Act 2016; The Act recognizes customary land rights including the customary right of occupancy and provides for their adjudication and documentation.

Forest Act<sup>11</sup> 2016; this Act makes provision for the conservation and management of the public, community, and private forests and areas of forest land that require special protection define the rights in forests and prescribes rules for the use of forest land. It also makes provision for community participation of forest lands by community forest association, the trade-in forest products, the protection of indigenous forests, and the protection of water resources.

**What is the status of women in the indigenous communities ? Are there cultural taboos against them or they are more independent?**

Kenya's indigenous women are confronted by multifaceted social, cultural, economic and political constraints and challenges. Firstly, by belonging to

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<sup>11</sup><http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/ForestConservationandManagementActNo34of2016.pdf>

minority and marginalized peoples nationally; and secondly, through internal social-cultural prejudices.

These prejudices have continued to deny indigenous women equal opportunities to rise from the morass of high illiteracy and poverty levels. It has also prevented them from having a voice to inform and influence cultural and political governance and development policies and processes, due to unequal power relations at both basic and national levels.

These factors have contributed to their limited access to land natural resources and sufficient credit facilities. The Kenya government have not been able to deal with the Constitution of Kenya rule third of everything should belong at least one gender, women have not met that threshold, despite their agitation

**What is Ogiek Peoples' Development Programme and when and how did it associate with ILC.**

Ogiek Peoples' Development Program (OPDP) is an organization that was formed in 1999 and registered as an NGO in 2001<sup>12</sup>. It works promote land rights, culture & language and other sustainable development among the Ogiek Community and other Indigenous Peoples in Kenya and Africa. OPDP host the Hunter-gatherer Forum (HUGAFO-K) which is an alliance formed to address the hunter-gatherer issues in Kenya.

OPDP joined ILC in 2014, and since then they have been leading Indigenous Peoples on their land and territories under CBI5 in Africa.

At the international arena, OPDP is member of the International Lands Alliance (ILC) and is privileged to lead a commitment on indigenous peoples' territorial rights (CBI 5). CBI 5 of International Lands Coalition (ILC) is an area of focus by the indigenous peoples of Africa organized under the auspices of the ILC coalition with the goal on securing territorial rights for the indigenous peoples.

The Ogiek Peoples Development Program(OPDP) coordinates the activities of the platform in the region of Africa in about 9 countries i.e., Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Burundi, Central Africa Republic, DR Congo,

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ogiekpeoples.org/>



Zimbabwe, Cameroon, and Botswana. CBI 5 has close to fifteen members from the countries mentioned above.

Your own life has been extremely inspiring. A man who grew up in difficult conditions and actually 'paying back' to the community now through his Human Rights and other work. Please share with us your childhood, your education and about your parents ?

I was born in a village called Sogoo, Narok County in Kenya to my mother Mrs Kiteleki Kobei and my late father Kantai Kobei with 7 siblings. Out of the 7 two of my sisters didn't get a chance to be in school and they were married off at young age with no formal education , they are older people now. My parents were kin in education hence they took us to school despite their illiteracy, my father was a fierce hunter who killed Animals including Buffalos and Elephants.

I grew up in the deep forest of Mau where school going was a challenge but managed to cross the valleys and the flooded rivers of Mau, I attended Sogoo Primary School in 1978 to 1985, join a day Secondary School in Nyanturango in Kisii from 1985 to 1989 , I managed to join DAVV University (Former University of Indore )at Islamic College in Indore Madhya Pradesh (M.P) , 1990 to 1993, left India in 1994 with Bachelor of Commerce degree. In 1994 we started the Ogiek community movement and later got employed with the Government of Kenya for two years and later got employed in Egerton University, proceeded to Netherlands for postgraduate diploma under NUFFIC scholarship in Maastricht School of Management (MSM), the Netherlands. In 2010 I graduated with Master of Business Administration (MBA), Strategic Management, Egerton University, Kenya. Parallel to all my academic and trainings, I got involved in Human rights, Land rights and Environmental rights which have done passionately till today.

We know the work of human rights defenders is filled with threats both from the government as well as the land mafias. Have you faced such threats and if yes, how do you respond to them ?

Human rights defender has always been threatened and scared away by the government as they address their issues. Land problem remains a major challenge especially among the indigenous peoples and the mechanisms to address this problem rest in the hands of the HRDs. Evictions in Kenya

happens without Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). The need for consultation is never taken as a measure by the government and what follow this is intimidation. Hence as a HRD I have always reported and written statements with the Kenya Police. Members of the Defenders Coalition have also amplified the voices of human rights defenders.

In 2019 I faced the apex of my work in fighting for rights of Ogiek community, where land mafias wanted to eliminate me, they fundraised for hitmen because of my struggle with land issues in Kenya. They went ahead to burn down the house of my Programmes officer and scared his life and that he shouldn't work with me.

**How has Covid-19 affected communities in your country ? How has the government responded ?**

The Covid-19 pandemic has ravaged the economic, social aspects of the communities. The Kenya Forest Service (KFS) led eviction of forest encroachers in Logoman, Kiptunga, Mariashoni and Bararget forests in June 2020<sup>13</sup>. This resulted in dislocation of approximately 500 Ogiek families in Mariashoni location, despite the ACHPR ruling<sup>14</sup> that Ogiek should not be evicted from Mau Forest. The eviction led to ethnic clashes in July 2020 in East Mau<sup>15</sup>, whereby 7 community members lost their lives, over 78 houses torched down, property looted and others destroyed.

There was widespread harassment and brutal molestation of Ogiek women in East Mau. In efforts to speak out against police brutality, hundreds of Ogiek women staged a peaceful demonstration on 21st August 2020 in Nessuit location. They walked for over 30km from Nessuit to Njoro to seek audience from Njoro Sub-County Commissioner, but nothing was addressed.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://redd-monitor.org/2020/07/16/kenya-forest-service-evicts-300-ogiek-families-from-their-homes-in-the-mau-forest-despite-the-african-court-on-human-and-peoples-rights-2017-ruling-that-the-ogiek-should-not-be-evicted/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ogiekpeoples.org/images/downloads/Judgement-for-Ogiek-Case-at-the-African-Court.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <https://minorityrights.org/2020/07/17/ogiek-evictions/>

FGM and early pregnancy has been on the rise during the COVID-19 period. There were increased cases of women and girls undergoing Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Girls who underwent the process were married off early.

Restriction of assembly and movement since the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Kenya. The government had introduced a nationwide curfew and restricted all social gatherings in order to curb the spread. The pandemic made masses lost jobs and the scale to businesses also reduced rapidly. This situation worsen as social gathering were banned to curb the spread of the pandemic. Cases of early pregnancies and gender-based violence increased.

More people lost jobs. Although the government introduced economic stimulus of food aid and health care not all communities were reached through these programmes.

Do you think that land reforms or family farming has become more relevant after the Covid 19 due to more job losses and reverse migration. If yes, then share with us your thoughts as to why land reforms be brought back on the national and international agenda ?

Land as primary factor of production remains as a more fundamental need for Indigenous People, regarded as protected area. Without land there is no sustainable development. For Indigenous Peoples the government have not recognized their territories and more of their territorial landscape converted into conservation reserves or as protected areas. For this reasons majority of indigenous land are not properly documented in any form. The agencies associated with protected forest for instance the Kenya Forest Service (KFS) used force to evict these communities even during the Covid-19 pandemic without FPIC. These forceful evictions make the communities more prone to underdevelopment and thus poverty increases.

There is no sustainable development without land. The Indigenous Peoples land rights should recognize. Land reforms in Kenya is taking an excellent direction since the promulgation of the new constitution 2010. This constitution brought progressive elements such as the National Land

Commission<sup>16</sup> (NLC) which was mandated to hear and investigate present and historical land injustice as one of its functions. There is also the Community Land Act 2016<sup>17</sup>, which enable community to register land as a collective entitlement.

Are land reforms possible without speaking about the issue of land grabbing by those who used proximity to power and possession. I mean are land reforms possible without seeking an upper limit of land ceiling on individuals and industries ?

Land reforms and policy are driving wheels towards solving historical land injustices in Kenya. Since the promulgation of the new Constitution of Kenya 2010, land governance have changed. But the historical injustices meted by the political class and well-connected people still remain unresolved. Formation of Commissions such as the Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission<sup>18</sup> (TJRC), the Ndung'u Commission<sup>19</sup>, Taskforces<sup>20</sup> among other commissions was progressive but LACK OF POLITICAL GOODWILL remains a major challenge.

Possession of land has no ceiling limit and thus holding is connected to resource availability and connectivity.

Who are the ruling elite in your country ? In many countries issues of caste and race emerge in the land questions. How do you address the question after you got independent? I mean now you are being 'ruled' by your own people so who do you blame for not making or implementing the prof people laws ?

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.klrc.go.ke/index.php/constitution-of-kenya/117-chapter-five-land-and-environment/part-1-land/234-67-national-land-commission>

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[http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/CommunityLandAct\\_27of2016.pdf](http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/CommunityLandAct_27of2016.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> <https://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/tjrc/>

<sup>19</sup>[https://mokoro.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/ndungu\\_report\\_land\\_and\\_graft\\_in\\_kenya1.pdf](https://mokoro.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/ndungu_report_land_and_graft_in_kenya1.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.loc.gov/item/2018338351/>

Before the colonial rule, communities in Kenya had their leadership structures that administered land rights among their members for purposes of activities such as the construction of shelter, farming, grazing, hunting, and gathering. Communities lived in harmony and occasional fights over territorial claims were resolved by panels of elders. The colonial government not only imposed alien land tenure relations but also introduced conceptual, legal, and sociological confusion in traditional tenure systems. This led to far-reaching disruption of the African customary land tenure system and laws.

After independence the political class that took power inherited the system of colonial land administration. This created classes of connected people with policies such *willing buyer willing seller* this was a loophole that left many people landless. Communities such as the Ogiek whose reserve was the forest later changed as the government termed these territories as protected areas.

**What should be the alternative to fight against land grab and how can international organizations and solidarities help ?**

Policy implementation remains a major challenge to redress the issue related land tenure among indigenous communities. This is a result of political goodwill by the succeeding governments which has an excellent supreme law which is the new Constitution of 2010. With a good will to implement these policies that the marginalized communities would get justice. Thus, civil societies and human rights defenders should continue to voice to address this denied rights through national and international advocacy mechanisms.



# MOHAMMAD CHEICK MKHAITIR

Humanist and anti slavery activist, Mauritania

*Untouchability is worse than slavery in Mauritania*

Mohammad Cheick Mkhaitir belongs to an untouchable community in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, a country of nearly five million population colonised by the French once upon a time in Western Africa and surrounded by Atlantic Ocean, Western Sahara, Algeria, Mali and Senegal. Most of the Western Africa was under French control who tried to push 'secular' laws in these countries and yet after their decolonisation process old superstructure of these societies. Mauritania is 28<sup>th</sup> biggest country in size and much bigger than Bangladesh, Pakistan and other neighbouring countries of India.

Cheick Mkhaitir is a Mauritanian blogger and was born in 1983. He completed his Masters of Economics in 2009. Hailing from the untouchable community who faced at different level due to religion, he wrote certain articles critical of Islam in his Facebook post in 2013. His article, "Religion, Religiosity and Craftsmen" was also published in some other websites for which he was arrested on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014 and kept in Nouadhibou prison. According to news reports, " in 2013, Mkhaitir published an article on a local news Web site criticizing the marginalization of Mauritanian artisans and the use of religion to perpetuate their disenfranchisement. Mr. Mkhaitir likened the treatment of certain groups in Mauritania to the alleged marginalization of minorities during the time of Prophet Mohammad.

Surprisingly, on November 9, 2017 the Supreme Court overturns the death penalty and sentences him to two years in prison. On the day of his release from prison, he was kidnapped by military force, and he stayed with them almost two years in kidnapping. April 27, 2018 The law is hardened,

blasphemy and apostasy are punished with a penalty of Mandatory death, without the possibility of repentance.

But there were surprises for him. He was released on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2019 and sent to Senegal. He finally arrived in France on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019. It was not that the release happened automatically. He says that it was international pressure which compelled the government to release him and allow him go to France who had provided him the necessary visa immediately. The Mauritanian security forces ensured that he did not stay in Mauritania even for a single day and left for France immediately.

Mohammad Cheick Mkhaitir is now living in France but his family live in deep distress. His father lost everything and the family is completely isolated. Civil rights organisations don't raise his issue for the fear of marginalisation and intimidation by the local authorities. His story is an indictment of governance model through religious norms. It is important religion if required should be purely personal and no state or extra-state actors should be allowed to dictate terms and conditions to people. Right to choose and embrace religion should be a fundamental right but unfortunately nation-states are using religion to propagate hatred and stereotyping about others. Under the Sharia laws, a Muslims cant disown Islam which is termed as 'apostasy' and punishable to death penalty in most of the cases. The other dangerous law frequently misused against the minorities and marginalised are blasphemy laws which prohibit anything that question religious text and authority.

In an interview with me Mohammad Cheick Mkhaitir said that while there is substantial understanding about slavery and racism in the Western world yet they are unaware that untouchability and caste system exists in Africa (Ofcourse, we only thought it existed in India and South Asia). He said that the conditions of untouchables and slave classes are extremely difficult in Mauritania. Unfortunately, it is not the Western whites who abuse their power and religion at the moment but the co-religionists, the white Arabs. It clearly indicates that religion itself is not a unifying factor as your ethnic identity is much bigger and important as we say in Indian subcontinent that caste identities are more powerful than a religious identity. As the dirt of racism, caste system, slavery will get exposed all over the world, we will realise that sociological or political discourse revolving around religion will become redundant as your ethic identities become extremely important.



Whether the Brahmanical elite in India or white elite in Europe or America or Arab elite in Africa or something elsewhere, a system of oppression was created and religion provided it the biggest cover up to these historical wrongs. International laws need to be respected and implemented everywhere so that the ugly relic of the past is buried permanently.

You recently made a presentation to the UN Human Rights Council on the state of slavery and caste discrimination in Mauritania, where some of the human rights defenders face serious criminal charges under the Blasphemy and Apostasy Act. What are their conditions in prison? Do their families support them or are they also socially isolated?

The prisoners of conscience, defenders of human rights and opponents of slavery live in tragic conditions inside Mauritanian prisons, and it does not stop there, as they live in harsher conditions due to social isolation, their families disavow them, - families are obliged to do so, because the clergy considers that any family which has not disowned its children who violate the dominant religious mentality are unfaithful families which must be socially isolated - which puts the prisoners in a very difficult situation in all respects, in the recent arrests that I spoke about in front of the United Nations One of the detainees was released, but found himself isolated and without work, as he was working as a teacher in one of the primary schools, but the clerics lobbied on government to strip it of its duties, and their argument in this is that anyone with secular thinking is a danger to future generations and should not be part of the educational organization.

You face six years in prison in Mauritania for alleged “blasphemy” and “apostasy”. Can you tell us what you " wrote " for which you were arrested?

At the end of 2013, I wrote an article on slavery and social class in Mauritania, and since the Mauritanian system is an Islamic religious system and the laws are laws derived from Islamic Sharia, the article spoke and revealed the origins of slavery in Mauritania and its close relationship with the Islamic religion, I have presented several examples, and most of these examples were taken from the era of the Prophet Muhammad and some of the practices he practised, which are at the heart of slavery .

Following the article, the Ulema and the tribal system considered the article to be an accusation of inhumanity and loss of the quality of justice of the Prophet Muhammad. As a result, I was charged with blasphemy and sent to jail, I was sentenced to death, and a decision was made by the clergy to divorce my wife, and she was forcibly married off to another man. .

**What were the charges against you and when were you arrested?**

I was accused of apostasy and blasphemy, and sent to prison on 02/01/2014

**How did you get released? How were you treated in prison? Have you been tortured?**

I was released at the end of 2019, after six years spent completely in solitary confinement, prison conditions were very harsh, to the point that I sometimes went seven months without a shower, and the psychological pressure was terrible, and the treatment of prison guards, I was not entitled to family visits until a year after my arrest and after the death sentence was passed after the trial I underwent at the end of 2014.

**Explain to our readers what exactly “blasphemy” and apostasy mean under Islamic law?**

Apostasy in Islamic law simply means that a person declares his departure from the Islamic religion. As for Blasphemy, it has other meanings, including criticizing religion and the symbols of religion, adopting visions and philosophies that contradict Islamic law, denying an Islamic postulate such as jihad and slavery for example, or Demand rights for women outside of what is stipulated in Islamic law, and the two terms share one result, which is the abandonment of Islam.

**We have heard about slavery in Mauritania. How it works. Who are the “owners” and who are the “slaves”. How many people serve as "slaves" in Mauritania?**

Slavery in Mauritania is an ancient practice that began since the entry of Islam into Mauritania. In Islamic law, prisoners of jihad campaigns turn into slaves - as happened with the Yazidis after the "ISIS" campaigns against them - the same scenario happened in Mauritania when the armies

of Islamic Jihad entered, and in Islamic law, sons of slaves automatically become slaves. And the Sharia establishes in its laws provisions regulating the inheritance of slaves from father to son. And so slavery continues to this day.

The " owners " of the slaves are whites of Arab origin, and the slaves are blacks and browns of African or Berber origin. There are no official statistics on the percentage of slaves because the government refuses to do so. However, there are rough figures, such as those announced by the organization Walk Free, which estimated the proportion of slaves to be between 10% and 20% of the population.

I have also heard of "White Moore" and Black Moore in your country. What are these terms and who do they refer to.

“Maure / Moor ” relates to Mauritania, and that is why we use the term “Maure-Blanc” to denote the Mauritanian Arabs, and the expression “Maure-noir” to denote the African Mauritians.

In India, we have always believed that the caste system is an Indian " discovery " which is supremacy based on the birth of a particular community and virtual slavery for others. There were four varnas and each one must function according to the varna system. How the caste system works in Mauritania. How many “castes” are there? Are they equal in rights or do they have " gradual inequality " as it exists in India ?

There are three basic castes in Mauritania. The first is the “ Beïdane ”, which means the class of masters, the second is the “ Harratine ”, who are the slaves, and the third is the “ Maalmine ” class , which is the untouchable class, and I belong to the third class.

And there is a gradual inequality, based on religious and social " reason ".

Who owns the “lands” and “resources” in Mauritania? Who are the landless communities?

Land in Mauritania belongs to the master class, and some former slaves own a small part of it. As for the class of " Maalmine / untouchables", they have nothing.

All over the world we have heard that Islamic societies do not discriminate and that there is no caste system, but your country gives us a different picture. Can you tell us what kind of discrimination communities face on the basis of their "castes".

Class is at the heart of the Islamic religion, and there are several Quranic verses confirming this, and there are many hadiths of the Prophet in this context, and I know very well that many clerics try to deny it. The Islamic system divides society into three classes, the first of which is that of masters, the second is the class of " Mawali s " and then comes the class of slaves. The Mauritanian social / religious system has produced three basic layers, as I mentioned in a previous question, which are:

- Beïdane = Masters
- Harratine = Slaves
- Maalmine = Untouchables

The closest example of "Maalmine" caste is the Dalit caste in India, although there are many differences.

The destiny of " Maalmine " is to remain outcasts, while the international silence persists, as slaves often end their suffering once freed, and the discourse on slavery is understood around the world and the discourse anti- slavery can be delivered to all international forums, as for the untouchable classes, their reality is harsher, because the discourse on the untouchables does not find anyone to listen to in most human rights forums.

Is untouchability practiced in your country? How is it practiced. Who are the "untouchables" and what is their "occupation" and their work.

The ostracism to which the untouchables are subjected takes several forms, the most famous of which is of a religious nature, where religious tales say: that anyone associated with them will come on the Day of Resurrection in a shameful situation, and you express that he remains contemptible regardless of his level of education, and he is not allowed to testify in court.

The " Maa lmine / untouchables " class in Mauritania is allowed to do mostly limited jobs, and these jobs are limited to blacksmithing, carpentry and some manual work considered socially inferior . where does their name

( Maalmine ) come from ? this word means: "People who do menial work , (there are few people do other administrative work under certain conditions).

Social jokes that express lies, hypocrisy, shame and baseness are attributed to the " Maalmine / untouchables). You should not meet one of the " Maalmine / Intouchables " at the start of your day because it brings bad luck, believes the Mauritanian community.

**Have you ever faced " untouchability", caste discrimination or racial discrimination as an individual? If so, please share with us and how you handled this**

I have personally been exposed to many attitudes and practices to which those excluded from my social class are subjected to marginalization and injustice. In my work which I carried out in Mauritania (accountant), I did not have the right to occupy a position higher than the positions of the master class, even if my diploma exceeds their diplomas (I hold a master's degree in economy, at a time when my managers did not have two years in university, but their social status forces me to be inferior to them) . I have also personally experienced all the bad things mentioned in the answer to the previous question. The bad thing is that none of the human rights organizations want to speak out and shed light on the pain we live in (me and my social class) and they only talk about slavery, and they ignore our situation as untouchables living in the most horrible conditions, and this is something that made me very disappointed, almost because of it I lose all faith in human rights organizations.

**Please share with us your journey, your parents, your childhood and your struggles.**

I was born in 1983, I have three brothers (two girls and a boy) and I am the oldest of my brothers. I received pure religious education in my childhood until I memorized the Quran and many Islamic Sharia books, then I entered the regular school and continued my studies until that I get a master's degree in economics. My thoughts started to change when I entered the university, where I then moved to the capital to study, and I started to read a lot of books, I was not satisfied since my childhood with the situation social imposed, but I had no choice, I was expelling the ideas that came to me from time to time, except The university scene was a

crucial step, because I joined a student movement of the communist left (I do not know not the exact reason: is it because I like their proposal? are they the only ones able to give a voice to an outcast like me? Or are the two possibilities). After my first year in college, my ideas became clear enough to defend my issue - the untouchables issue - and other causes like slavery. And I took the writing as a weapon to fight the battle. I continued to work in this framework until one of the articles at the end of 2013 led me to stand in front of the gallows.

How is the school system, the program. What is the “religious” morality taught at school? Do schools and the education system discriminate against individuals on the basis of their birth?

The school system is fundamentally a religious system, and the religious morals of this school are based primarily on teaching children that the world is divided into two parts: Muslims and infidels, with its negative accusations and the culture of hatred. There is no law that prevents the mixing of social class children in schools, but the reality is that the neighbourhoods in which lower class people congregate do not get much attention from a standpoint.

How “independent” is the justice system in your country. Is there a representation of "slave communities" in justice?

There is absolutely no judicial independence in the country, and for people from the “lower” social classes (slaves and Untouchables), their presence is very negligible in the judicial institutions and the prosecution. After raising the issue of the Maalmine / Untouchables, the government started appointing them to a post in early 2015.

Some IRA activists in your country have been accused of "burning" Maliki law books. What are these laws and why did they burn it down? What happened to the activists?

The Malikite books are slavery books that legalize slavery and regulate the slave trade. And so they burned it down. Most of the people who carried out this operation are still in the anti-slavery arena.

How many activists are facing accusations of blasphemy and apostasy in Mauritania today?

Over the past eighteen months, more than 12 people have been returned to prison on the basis of these charges, and there are still cases before the prosecution that could be prepared for these charges as well.

How did you come into association with Humanist International and when? Are you a humanist? Do you think that humanism has the strength to fight against all religious discrimination ignored in the name of "religious freedom"?

I have known Humanist International, while I was in prison, thanks to contacts made by Mr. Qassem Ghazali with my family, and it was the first organization to take a direct interest in my case. Of course, I present myself as a humanist. Despite all the difficulties, I believe that a humanist can achieve much of what is required in this world.

How important is the work done by Humanist International?

I believe that all the work done by Humanist International is very important, and as a person of the Sahel-Saharan Africa - a marginalized African region - I find that Humanist International is the only organization of human rights that values pay attention to this region.

What would you say to the international community regarding slavery, racism and caste discrimination? Should they not be declared crimes against humanity and dealt with seriously through an international legal mechanism?

My message to the international community: You should know that rights are indivisible, that double standards are a disgrace of values, and that linking human rights to politics is shameful and disgusting. We are on the verge of losing confidence in you, because reality reveals your orientation according to the interests of the great international powers. The human rights are indivisible.

I read that Mauritania has not imposed any death sentence since 1987. Was there no judgment related to the death penalty or had the government abolished the death penalty?

It is true that Mauritania has decided to suspend the death penalty since 1987, but that has not prevented it from applying the penalty in certain cases, as happened in 1990 when the death penalty was applied to dozens of people. Consequently, the suspension of the sentence by Mauritania is only a partial suspension, and the penalty is applicable at all times because there is no law preventing it.

**What is the most "popular" punishment for "infidels" in Mauritania?**

As for the so-called "infidels" in Mauritania, the penalties to which they are subjected socially vary according to their social nature.

Like what:

- If the concerned is an individual, He will be referred to justice, and his social status always plays a major role in the treatment to him. If he comes from the class of masters then he will get a easier treatment. Individuals of the slave and untouchable classes are treated very harshly.
- If the person concerned is a family then :  
The families of the masters are not at all concerned with the issue, and the families descended from slaves and untouchables, the influence on them is strong, because if they do not oppose their children, they will be excluded from any relationship in society, and this is what happened with some members of my family

**What was the immediate thought when you were sentenced to death in front of the firing squad? Does this seem to be the most brutal form of any punishment?**

The moment of the death sentence was a strange and exceptionally brutal moment, and the strangest was the amount of joy and happiness that pervaded the people in the room. I looked at them to see a person with the slightest sign of sympathy. Everyone was happy. I looked to my left side, where the defence lawyer's seats were completely empty because I didn't have a lawyer at the time.

The security guards didn't allow me to stay any longer in the lobby until I gazed at these hate-filled faces, they took me out of the lobby and brought me back to prison, I went back to my prison cell, and after thinking long



and hard about what happened, I knew I was facing a new reality and that I would be alone and that I had to face it with force.

What do you think was the reason for your release? Your "apology" or did the government work under international pressure?

I think the only reason for my release was international pressure.

How did you come to France? Did the government help you?

On the day of my release, I was leaving Mauritania for Senegal under the supervision of Mauritanian military security, where I contacted the French embassy who gave me a visa to travel to France.

How is your family at home? Do they fear their lives or do they live well?

My family lives in very difficult conditions inside Mauritania, where they suffer from social isolation and lack of access to the labour market and benefit from public service.

All over the world, people talk about racism in terms of white Europeans and African-Americans, but your country has faced it with white Arabs when most of us just read that Islam does not preach any discrimination based on your birth or caste?

In Islam, there are rules that establish social stratification, and these foundations derive from the Qur'anic verses and hadiths of the Prophet. For example, the following Hadith:

*God, when He created creation, sent Gabriel, so He divided the people into two parts: Arabs and non-Arabs. And the goodness of God was in the Arabs*  
\*

\*Reference: AlMouejam Al-Awsatte Vol. 4 Page 135.

And, the Hadith establishes social stratification in Islam, and the examples are many.

How was it possible that despite being born in one of the most marginalized communities, you were able to get a good education. What was your parents' profession?

It can be said that I was very lucky compared to others of the same social class, because my father was one of the few to be able to access education thanks to certain educational programs set up by France after independence in 1960. This opportunity allowed me to grow up in an educated family, which allowed me to achieve the level of education I attained.

My father was an administrator, and he was dismissed from all his duties, as part of the persecution of my family members who did not oppose me. As for my mother, she was a homeless housewife.

Have you ever been discriminated against at school or college because of your origin? What discrimination was involved?

Admittedly, I have suffered a lot of discrimination, injustice, and racism during my school career and at all levels of education up to university.

There are well-established sayings in the Mauritanian collective consciousness that say that the "Maalmine" have no value, even if they are educated, every time I obtained a high score on a test or an exam, the teacher confronted me with these sentences instead of encouraging me, and he told me that I had been created for the "inferior" manual services and that I had to do them and stop teaching.

At the undergraduate level, there was a scholarship dedicated to students in economics, especially in the accounting department, and this scholarship was given to the student who obtained the highest grade in accounting, I thought carefully about this scholarship and I decided to specialize in economics, and I focused a lot on accounting at the expense of other subjects, and at the final exam I obtained a full grade in accounting, 20 out of 20, and it was the first time that this degree was obtained in the history of the University of Nouakchott. , ( You can find attached a copy of my transcripts) , But the shock came at the end , and I was deprived of this right because I belong to the class of "Maalmine" and the scholarship was given to another student who got a bad grade compared to me, but he interceded for his social status because he belongs to the masters.

Do you intend to return?

Of course, I intend to go back, there is no precise timetable for this, and I am in contact with many Mauriticians at home and abroad, and we will not leave the country hostage to racists.



# AMINATA MBAYE

## Senegal

### *Islam and modern beliefs are not in conflict*

Aminata Mbaye FALL is a young Journalist based in Dakar. She is still a student yet pursuing her profession. Aminata's parents are government officers and follow Islam and yet it never came into conflict with her absolute belief in Secular culture of her country as well as living a life to pursue her ambition. We met during the Global Land Forum's conference in Dakar where she and one of her colleague interviewed me on Indian situation. I found her full of confidence and realize that its important to interact with her and find her views on Islam, culture and many other things which fascinate me as a traveller and activist. She is not an English speaker and works with a French language national paper in her country yet she tried to answer my intruding questions because I wanted to bring out these facts for reader's domain to understand what makes Senegal so special.

How long have you been a journalist? What inspired you to become a journalist? Was there any problem at family when you wanted to become a journalist? Please tell us about it.

I am a journalist since 2011. It's a job that I always liked. I followed my passion. There has not been problems in my family since everyone is free to choose what he wants to do for a living at home.

What is your 'educational' qualification. Are you still studying ?

I am a journalist by training. Still I study Masters in media communication

What do your parents do? How many brothers and sisters are you and what do they do.

My father worked at the Ministry of Information and Communication. He was senior technician of broadcasting. My mother is Executive Secretary, Ministry of Urban Development. I have four brothers and one sister. My sister is in the logistics transportation, my brother who is in Morocco is in the telecom network. One is in the building, another in sports and 4th in politics.

Did you ever face any problem with working parents in relation to your growth, nurturing etc.

We had no problem feeding or growth . Working Mother , she was supporting somehow our needs

Are your parents religious ? How much and what influence they had on you.

My parents are Muslims. I am born in this religion I have learned the basics and I practice it. We are serious followers of Islam and dont make a joke of it.

How much religious are you ?

I am a Muslim practitioner and I do everything to fulfill my duties as Muslim woman

Senegal is a wonderful country with very hospitable people. It is 90% Muslim and yet very secular but most Muslims practice Sharia laws in private. Many men have four wives and they say it is tradition. What do you think about it?

Islam allows his men to take up to four wives provided they can put on the same level and in all things. It is their right but is that they can love them, treat them the same way, this is where the problem lies.

Would you like to marry a man who has already have wives and children.

I would not want to marry a man who already has a wife and children. I do not want to be home wrecker. But when I have a husband I will do everything in my power so it does not look elsewhere.

You said that Islam gives right to man to take up four wives. It means polygamy is prevalent in your country. You don't like it but you have not spoken in a forceful manner against it. Should religious dogmas and rights dominate over our life or the secular laws of our country?

For me it's all about choice. The religion is sacred, and each free to do What God Wants But he is the only judge

What is the condition of women in Senegal. Do women have land and property rights? Can they own property?

Women are in acceptable conditions here in Senegal although there remains a lot to be considered. They have the right to land and property if they can afford it.

Do you have right to inheritance? I mean can you claim right over your parental property?

Yes In the Muslim religion the children born of wedlock are entitled to the legacy of their parents

Do you want to stay in Senegal or go abroad? What is your ultimate aim?

My goal is to finish my studies, get a job that will allow me to be in touch with people, to help my country to develop, have a good husband and found my home in peace and discretion. I would like to discover other parts of the world but I will not leave the Senegal definitively.

Are you satisfied with what the government is doing for women in your country?

I would not say I'm satisfied but the government is still doing a lot of efforts in improving the conditions of women, access to school for girls, access to water, work decently, the law.

You are a journalist. How many women are journalists in your country? Are women welcome in the profession or are they not allowed?

I can't give you an exact number of women journalists but know that this is not a problem. There are many more female journalists than men. The

first woman journalist in Senegal is 89 years old today. Women have access to all positions provided they have the expertise.

Do you feel that Muslims should also adopt modern education and religion should just be very personal and not a way of public life.

Religion is a lifestyle, a practical system of belief. Being Muslim is not the same to be limited to rituals of worship or to be content to believe, while not acting according to that belief. Some mistakenly believe that Islam gives more importance to actions than inner faith when in reality; it teaches that faith is the first and largest of the five pillars and foundations of Islam.

Are marriages a choice or compulsion in your society? Can you marry out of your choice? Is inter-religious or interracial marriage acceptable in your society?

There are almost no racial or ethnic constraints nowadays in Senegal. The problem lies more in terms of religion. It is difficult to accept that a Muslim woman marrying a Christian man or vice versa.

What are the biggest challenges before Muslim women in your country. Do you think they should be given opportunity in jobs and all walks of life?

Senegal is a secular country and we do not apply the Sharia here. The women whether Muslim or Christian have access to all essential employment is that they have the required

There are reports of practice FGMs (Female Genital Mutilation) in Muslim women which is very painful and torturous. There is a lot of resistance in families when the girls go out and wear dresses according to their choice.

This practice has disappeared in Senegal. The Health Ministry had to fight a lot for the eradication of this scourge. Today the girls are free. This practice is exceeded. God thank you, I have not been a victim of this.

I loved the colourful dresses that women wear here. It's a very good mixture of Islamic and African values. I saw most of the Muslim women



wearing headscarf but did not see them in veils. Is Burqa not a tradition of Muslim women in your country?

Though putting the veil is an obligation for all Muslim women yet now everyone is free to do or not to do. It is not a tradition of putting the veil but rather a recommendation of God

Are there religious leaders who don't like women to come in open? Did you face any problem from religious leaders or anyone in the community for being a journalist or coming out openly?

There has never been problem between religious leaders and women. We had two women Prime Ministers, women ministers in the government of Deputies. etc.



# CONSTANCE GALE MOGALE

Alliance for Rural Democracy, South Africa

*Historical injustices can only be redressed through meaningful  
agrarian reforms*

Constance Galeo Mogale is an experienced South African land activist who has played leading roles in several campaigns and initiatives. She led grassroots movement called the Land Access Movement of South Africa (LAMOSA), A federation of communities claiming land through Restitution, an organisation that challenged the Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Act of 2015. She has a proven record in mobilisation, and have extensive experience on participatory research She currently coordinates the Alliance for Rural Democracy (ARD,) a loose network of organisations campaigning for land rights and livelihoods in South Africa. She is also holding a Post Graduate Diploma in Economic Management Science in the University of Western Cape and currently a 2018 Cohort of Atlantic fellowship programme, a partnership of Nelson Mandela Foundation and Columbia University in the USA. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in Economic Management Science.

What is the status of the Land Rights Movement in South Africa. I mean, after the revolution, we have not seen radical land reforms happening in Africa but as pressure is now building up, there are reports of formations of committees but things are still taking lot of time, please share with us what is happening there at the moment.

The need for radical social movements arises from the betrayal of promise by the current Government, which failed to transform the skewed patterns of land ownership and reversing the legacy of the History of Dispossession

The bitter colonial history of dispossession in South Africa tells us that land was taken from as far as the 1800. in 1913 Africans were cordially

allocated 7% percent of their country. 93 percent of it was handed to 349,837 colonial settlers. When this land was found inadequate for Africans the Tom lion Commission was appointed in 1916 and it was because of its findings that 20 years later, the colonial parliament passed the Native Trust Land Act 1936 which added 6 percent to the 7 percent allocated to Africans in 1913. This left the colonial settlers with 87 percent.

In 1950 the colonial parliament passed a law called Group Areas Act 1950 to remove those Africans who were too close to “European” land. This was to intensify colonial racism, which in 1948, colonial Prime Minister Daniel Malan named “apartheid” (race separation). When the situation did not change and the revolutionary movements in South Africa resorted to the armed struggle; the apartheid colonialist regime resorted to creating “tribal republics” for Africans where they would “rule themselves.” They were nine “republics” called “Homelands.” They were called Ciskei, Kwa-Ngwane, LebowaKwano, Kwa-Ndebele, Venda, Kwa-Zulu, QwaQwa, Transkei, and Bophuthatswana.

But maybe the reconciliation argument from the moderates, ANC ruling party could be, let us talk the here and now as it its complicated to resolve issues of 100 centuries ago. we need to bite what we can chew and talk the land rights now! The South African government land reform programme was supposed to deal with this injustice and provide redress, they failed! Only about 9% of the land was redistributed in 26 years since 1994 Many South Africans are frustrated by this slow pace hence the call for radical transformation on land and economic assets.

Unfortunately, there is a very big generational gap and knowledge deficit between land activists since economic factors are dominating the narratives. The young activists are following the trends, ANC and other political movements has gave up its liberation agenda, they are now economist activists who are promoting agenda of accumulation and pushing up the bank balance. It is difficult for social movement to function without capital and funding. So, the state of social mobilisation is very weak and co-opted.

What is the status of women in these movements. Have there been any specific efforts to bring them at the helm of the organisations. There are

more women in the ground but when the issue of leadership and decision making come, we find not much sincere efforts. Your take on this.

There are various spaces created for women only organising, for example we have different movements having women's leagues, young adults' forums and so forth. These spaces assisted a lot in trying to outroot the silent voices of women from the male dominated spaces, however without strategic integration, it will always be 'US and Them' We must also take into account that women are just not homogenous, they are part of communities from different classes, different positions of privilege, ethnicity, race and all. The question is whose voice is louder and why? To answer the question posed here correctly, perhaps we need to categorise these women spaces to be able to do justice in unpacking it.

Generally, women continue to play a vital role in the struggle for social justice in South Africa, yet their contribution is still unappreciated, and they are still marginalised. The reason is that most women themselves are still abiding by patriarchal systems and the social stereotypical defined gender roles. If you look at the contribution of women in all big movements, the churches, and the social groups, they are underestimated.

Their contribution is in terms of numbers, their double reproductive role and care work, yet their mindset and attitude are still one that is submissive to the masculine gender, to serve and to do the spadework. South Africa is often referred to as the "rainbow nation" to describe the country's multicultural diversity, especially in the wake of apartheid. The World Bank classifies South Africa as an upper-middle-income economy, and a newly industrialized country. Its economy is the second-largest in Africa, and the 34th-largest in the world. In terms of purchasing power parity, South Africa has the seventh-highest per capita income in Africa. However, poverty and inequality remain widespread.

What is the status of landlessness in your country. How do you define it legally? Whether the official definition is agreed by the social movements or not.

Landless is increasing, the trend is moving towards prioritising commercial production as opposed to social housing and social production. This trend has made South African government vulnerable during COVID19, and the social safety nets of the country are generally weak to cope during disasters.

This question is almost a follow up of the first question in the history of land dispossession.

South Africa's total land surface is 472,281 square miles. But from the early 1800 to 1969 through what the apartheid colonialist regime called Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act No. 46, nine "Bantu Republics," established and allocated 68,264 square miles of South African territory. The remaining 404,017 square miles with all its mineral and agricultural wealth and other national resources remained under the control of the minority white population, many of whom still have the arrogance to claim that they did not take land from anyone. They found it "empty!" Oh! well, maybe they thought its empty because Africans did not have boundaries, border gates, it as a free access to those who use it. We lost freedom of movement and was deprived of scarce natural resources.

I am an advocate of rural land, but landlessness in South Africa is more visible in peripheries of big cities and economic hub provinces such as Johannesburg, Durban, Capetown and Eastern Cape. Whereas I sometimes question the kind of reforms we are advocating for as South Africans, I am in full solidarity with the urban movements who continue to occupy land even if it means that they face the barrel of the gun from the SAPS, the Anti-Land Invasion Unit, the JMPD, the Red Ants and the so called Law Enforcement in Johannesburg, Durban, East London and Cape Town. These poor law-abiding citizens are criminalised for losing patience with the collapsing property redistribution system. They are impoverished people who continue to face evictions throughout the country.

The rural areas are so impoverished that people want to be closer to the cities so that they can improve their lives. When they occupy unoccupied land is because they seek to survive and to thrive, but most of the times they do not yield the expected results. We have seen now during COVID-19 era how black people who occupied land in search of economic opportunities struggled to put food in their tables.

**Is government redistributing land to the people or not? If yes, how much land has been allotted to people particularly those of African origin.**

Government has not done well in Redistributing land to the black dispossessed people of our country. Statistics shows that ever since 1994,

only 9% of the land was distributed, owing to the failed promise of 1994 ANC Manifesto, which promised to distribute 30% of the total surface area in 5 years, that was in 1999. The goal post shifted from 1999 to 2014 and still Government failed, by 2014 only 4% of the land was redistributed, and mostly for urban housing and urban claims which was mostly done through cash compensation than land. This is because of ever-changing policy framework which regressed from Reconstruction and Development Programme in 1994 to Growth, Economy and Redistribution Framework (GEAR) which was hailed by many economists but was highly criticized by labour movements and many CSO's. GEAR was Government five-year plan that focused on privatization and the removal of exchange controls, which was never evaluated to date.

This affected land reform policies where we saw the changes of Redistribution Policy from Settlement and Acquisition grants to Land for Redistribution and Agricultural policy which favoured commercial farming and monopolising of the industry. South African Government has no law which regulates redistribution and guiding officials on who is supposed to benefit, what land for what purposes. The policies proposed e.g. Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS) has turned South African beneficiaries into tenants, and LRAD has left many farmers indebted as grants was badly managed by Land Bank, one of State-owned enterprises.

Is there any law that prohibit people from amassing huge agricultural land, basically, the upper limit of having land. Like in India we have Land Ceiling laws which make land above certain limit as unlawful but then there are lots of gaps as people can acquire huge lands in the name of religious places, institutions as well as cow shelters.

We need a Land Redistribution Act and Subdivision of Agricultural Land Act in South Africa.

There is nothing in place for now. Policies such as land ceiling, Limitation of foreign ownership of land in South Africa, have since been proposed in 2005 Land Summit Resolution, but has never been implemented. In Redistribution, every new minister coming to power has proposed their own new policies such as Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy and LRAD, but these are not monitored and no one can hold Government

accountable, since these are just voluntary policies and not proclaimed acts of the law.

There are 2 progressive reports that was developed through appointment of High Panel On High Level Panel On The Assessment Of Key Legislation And The Acceleration Of Fundamental Change, led by the former Deputy President, Kgalema Motlanthe and the second one was appointed by the current President himself, Hon President Ramaphosa called Key Advisory Panel o land Reform which also presented very progressive recommendations, but all those progressive reports are overshadowed by the debate to expropriate land without compensation.

**How did you come in the Land Rights movement and when?**

I was born in the farming families who were dispossessed of their land and forcefully removed to further arid areas where farming life was impossible. Every evening, there was a group of male elders who used to gather in our house to discuss their fate, and to plan on how to react to the current challenges of livelihoods. My Grandmother was compensated with a 21 hector small holding but she was never allowed to occupy it, she settled in the village which was 30 km's away where everyone was given 450sqm yard, so it meant that the livestock would be taken care of by family uncles and she had no access or control to that wealth.

As a child I will always eavesdrop on the conversations, and I developed interest over time. When my Grandma was thinking of selling the land and the livestock, wise elders will encourage her to hold on to it. They always said to each other "You cannot sell the land like tomatoes in the market, we will hold on to those pockets until a solution id found. If you sell the land, lawyers will come to a stokvel to claim their share and you will be left with nothing, and to trap your wealth, you need to purchase more land" It is those conversations that taught me the meaning of real wealth, versus money in the bank.

In 1991, when I was completing my matric in Ramatlabama, I saw on television that the same group of strategists who always met at my Grandma's house are occupying the land forcefully in Ventersdorp. This activism was inspired by the release of Tata Nelson Mandela in prison. Many other dispossessed communities around the country was also going back to their land forcefully, supported by organisations such as Black



Sash, The South African Council of Churches, Legal Resources Centre etc. It was in those years that the Bantustan system was also attacked, and that inspired me to join those elders in their movement building. Shortly after that, a movement called Land Access Movement of South Africa was born, and when they formalised in 1999, I was recruited as the National Organiser in 1999.

**What was your childhood about. Your parents and village?**

My childhood life was that of a rural girl. I know all the chores of been a rural young girl who must walk more than 5 km to fetch water and wood. In the compensatory land of Vrishgewaagd where water was non-existence, as girls we used to take laundry and take a journey to the nearest stream to wash clothes. We used to collect dry cow dung to make fire, although at that time cows were kept far away from the village, and owners would deny us access, but we were fortunate because my grandmother owned a livestock.

My parents where both migrant workers in Johannesburg, my mother was a live-in domestic worker and my father was a petrol attendant. My father was originally from Lichtenburg, Botshabelo near Lichtenburg and my mother were from Goedgevonden near Ventersdorp. Their communities where forcefully removed, my fathers family was removed to Ramatlabama near Botswana and my mother's family was removed to Vrishgewaagd near Delareyville where I was schooled until Grade 8and went to my father's village to do my High School in Batlounge.

I am very thankful for my childhood because I became a resilient young mother, who acquired survival strategies from both of my grandmothers. I know how to use little water and recycle it for other uses, I save my own seed for next planting, I preserve summer vegetables for winter consumption, I know how to manage livestock and have inherited livestock from my grandmother, I bring valuable advice to other subsistence farmers but I also gained a lot of knowledge from framer activist in other parts of the world.

**Did you ever face racism? If yes, what was it about?**

Everyday, in one way or another. I never wanted to narrate many stories because they open healed wounds, but also make me seem like I am

looking for pity. Landlessness is equal to racism, the fact that it is only black people who are still denied their rights to land is racism. But perhaps that could be too general. It is not only racism, but class segregation and gender. I felt it, more when I moved to Johannesburg, working as a head of the black owned movement called Land Access Movement of South Africa. Discrimination as black commuting girl: It was difficult for me as a rural undergraduate girl and having to prove my ability to manage and run the movement effectively as a black woman with a rural background and having no social class or standard in the city. I stayed in my aunt's house in Soweto commuting to work by taxis, having to wait in the queue as early as 5.30 to be able to reach my office at 8 am. The taxis in Soweto operate from 4.30 am to 8 pm and after hours, you need a private shuttle to go home. It meant that I could not attend most meetings outside the vicinity of the city centre and could not participate in important decision-making spaces attended by other fellow white directors, yet I sat in the board of Directors of the former National Land Committee who were 80% white and I was the only black South African woman in the board.

Discrimination in funding: Whenever decisions on financial redistribution was made, I was always subjected to unfair due diligence check and unjust questions which resulted in LAMOSA not getting any funding. The network always demanded reports from me, and certified copies of supporting vouchers even though I didn't receive any cent from the network. Sometimes I will be asked ridiculous questions of having to justify whether LAMOSA is a movement, a NGO or a Civil Society Organisation, all terms that meant almost the same things to me. I was always side-lined from receiving any funds through the National Land Committee with a justification of capacity and identity. Nevertheless, LAMOSA survived through membership contributions and support of the land claimants and we were able to carry on with the programmes, recruit and pay staff etc.

The salary survey showed that I was less paid Director, which to me was okay because I knew that I am in a deficit of Educational qualifications. With the salary I received I had to build a home for my parents and my siblings, who acquired a site in Dobsonville, and we lived in a shack at that time. I also happened to have 3 children whose father abandoned me, so after the building of my Parents house, I had to prioritise their education and take them to school, that meant surplus money that I could have saved

for my own education went to their education. I managed to build my own house, and now I graduated in 2018 and have applied to do my master's degree.

I believe that white privilege must deal with it in the same way that I had to deal with my circumstances of rurality and blackness. I am not complaining, rather I am counting myself one of the few fortunate ones, because some are still trapped in these Poverty circles, caused by various reasons and without some saints giving them a break through it means their coming generations will still find themselves in the same situation. When you get a decent income, but you have to support your siblings, you have to build a home, you have to carry cost for funerals and orphans in your family etc, when are you getting a break through?

**Has racism finished from South Africa or it still exists?**

Unfortunately, yes! Racism still exists in South Africa, its so visible that its in our faces and we must gather courage to speak out about it, because keeping silent means we perpetuate it and we lose our own voices. Policies still favours the rich, there is clear cracks of divide between white and blacks in terms of redistribution of wealth and capital, by both the state and the financial sector. The income disparities between black and white and the resilience in times of disasters by white led companies versus black-led companies.

It is a fact that white people inherited generational wealth of capital and experience, therefore they are mostly debt resilient, but also if you look at the financial systems such as insurance companies, banks and the mortgage companies have always treated black people with contempt and trapping them into debt by making them pay premiums that they can never sustain.

Black farmworkers and domestic workers who work in private homes are enduring racism attacks and falsely accused every day. It is so bad in a way that media has chosen to report these cases in isolation and selectively, as if black lives do not matter.

We all talk a lot about the land reforms but when Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe wanted to legally acquire land from the powerful white farmers, there was all huge and cry. I am sure, there are similar situation in your country. Is there a resistance from the Western governments and

organisations about radical land reforms in your country? I mean how long can we have this unequal order where some people have thousands of hectares of land while many others do not even have space for their livelihood.

Regarding the Zimbabwe Fast Track Land Reform, the outcry was coming from the exempted blacks who signed up for western methods of politics, as South African we still regard Mugabe as the best African leader ever, especially when coming to decisiveness and clarity on matters of land reform and Zimbabwe systems of education. Robert Mugabe, like U Tata Nelson Mandela was never a saint, but for lack of better role models they were the best.

Our current Governments are continuing to reverse the gains made on land reform and transformation, they could not distribute the land and now they have discovered mineral wealth in the over-populated communal land. They are making laws that will empower the apartheid appointed traditional leaders to make decisions around mining on behalf of people, no Prior and Informed consent. In recent years, there has been an unexpected onslaught against the land rights of rural people in South Africa. This threat comes from new government policies and laws that set the apartheid-era homelands or Bantustans apart from the rest of South Africa as zones of chiefly sovereignty and undermine the citizenship rights of the people living within them. Urgent interventions are necessary to stave off imminent and irreversible dispossession.

The former Bantustans are home to the 17 million poorest South Africans. They constitute the 13% of land that was reserved for the black majority by the notorious Land Act of 1913. Under apartheid, the 'reserves' were consolidated into 10 sometimes fragmented 'homelands' for different apartheid-defined 'tribes. Black South Africans were stripped of their common citizenship and designated citizens of one or other homeland according to their home language. Black land ownership was prohibited outside the reserves.

Rural uprisings against the Bantustans and the traditional leaders who governed them were a major component of the anti-apartheid struggle. With the transition to democracy in 1994, however, the Bantustans were reincorporated into a unitary South Africa with a promise of equal

citizenship under an integrated legal regime. Land reform was promised to address the legacy of racially based structural dispossession.

New laws and policies betray this promise, however, and further dispossess the very people who bore the brunt of the Land Acts and the brutal forced removals that culminated in the consolidation of the Bantustans. These laws and policies seek to separate the former Bantustans from the rest of South Africa as zones of autocratic chiefly power, in the process transferring ownership and control of land that ordinary people have inherited over generations to traditional leaders. President Zuma sees traditional leaders as important strategic partners who can deliver the rural vote at a time when support for the ANC is declining in the major cities, including Johannesburg.

Driving these laws and policies is the irony that some of the former Bantustans, once assumed to be the least valuable land, have been found to hold massive reserves of valuable minerals – platinum in North West and Limpopo, coal and iron in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal and titanium along the Wild Coast of the Eastern Cape. The poorest South Africans live on some of the richest land, but for many this has proved to be a curse, rather than an opportunity.

The primary beneficiaries of South Africa's new mining rush are not the people, but mining companies and politically connected elites, including traditional leaders. Recent law specifies that the state will grant mining rights only to companies with black economic empowerment partners. It is an open secret that officials often dictate who such partners should be. The scale and spread of mining investments by senior politicians and their close associates is no secret, and we continue to mobilise rural citizens to defend their land rights against these big giants.

**What has been the achievements of your organisations as far as land rights are concern.**

Throughout the policy debates and submissions, The ARD succeeded in amplifying the voices of rural women who have been at the forefront of opposition to the Bantustan bills such as Tribal Courts Bill, arguing that it would create a separate legal system for the 17 million people living in the former Bantustans and render them as subjects of traditional leaders with second class rights in the South African democracy.

The Alliance for rural Democracy, which I am coordinating has strongly opposed these policies with the support by rural people. These new laws and policies which are widely perceived to herald a return to the autocratic powers that traditional leaders had during apartheid. A legal challenge to the Restitution of Land Rights reopening resulted in that Act being struck down by the Constitutional Court in 2016- see LAMOSA vs National Council of Provinces (NCOP) 1 and 2. A more recent example of this popular pushback was the defeat of the Traditional Courts Bill in Parliament. The Bill would have given traditional leaders far-reaching punitive powers, including the power to strip people of customary entitlements such as land rights. Alliance for Rural Democracy played a central role in supporting this struggle. The Bill failed when the government could not muster the support of five of the nine provinces in 2014 but came back again in 2015 together with several others, that resulted in the launching of the Stop the Bantustan bills campaign. In 2019, our rural activists followed ANC rallies and campaigns and handed over letters and petition against 4 bills, namely

Traditional and Khoisan Leadership Bill

Traditional Courts Bill

The Mining and Petroleum Development Amendment Act

The Communal Property Association Amendment Act

The Communal Land Rights Bill

Recently the ANC led introduced new policies and laws and amendments that seeks to marginalise rural citizens from enjoying the new constitutional democracy. These policies and laws set the former homelands apart from the rest of South Africa as zones of chiefly sovereignty and undermine the citizenship rights of the 18 million people living within them. The reason behind this move is the irony that some of the former Bantustans, once assumed to be the least valuable land, have been found to hold massive reserves of valuable minerals – platinum in North West and Limpopo, coal and iron in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal and titanium along the Wild Coast of the Eastern Cape. The poorest South Africans live on some of the richest land, but for many this has proved to be a curse, rather than an opportunity.

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Government and Traditional leaders in South Africa see land ownership by ordinary people as hindrance to their intended development without consultation and consent and a threat to their power. Unfortunately, land was bought by group syndicate's and the communities are the ones who claimed land through Restitution of land rights in the 1996-1998 era. The President attempted to reopen the claims through the Restitution of land rights amendment act of 2016 to allow traditional leaders to lodge the claim. Shortly after the passing of the Restitution amendment act, King Zwelithini announced that his Ingonyama Trust would submit a massive claim to all land lost by the 'Zulus' since 1838. The amendment act was successfully challenged in 2016, and the Constitutional Court declared it invalid for the reasons of lack of Public Participation, see LAMOSA and others vs NCOP

The announcement of these massive claims to overlapping tracts of land has been greeted with alarm by rural people – as has the new Communal Land Tenure Policy unveiled in September 2014, which proposes new legislation that would transfer title to most land in the former Bantustans to traditional structures headed by chiefs. The families who actually own most of this land would get weak 'institutional use rights' to their homestead plots only. Title to fields, grazing land and forests would be transferred to traditional structures, who would have the sole power to enter business, tourism, and mining ventures 'on behalf of the community'.

Instead of legislating a communal tenure law that will secure tenure rights to 18 million people living in the former Bantustans, the CLTP and ITB facilitates the downgrading of indigenous ownership to leasehold. This contradicts the land rights guaranteed by section 25(6) of the Constitution, which provides that people whose land tenure is insecure because of past racial discrimination are entitled to legally secure tenure, or to comparable redress. At least two post-apartheid laws explicitly protect 'informal'

indigenous rights. In addition, the Ingonyama Act itself forbids the trust from infringing on existing rights and interests.

The process of excluding and dispossessing ordinary people is a general one in South Africa and not confined to KwaZulu-Natal. Serious problems exist in respect of platinum mining projects on communally owned land in North West and Limpopo provinces. The pattern is one of opaque mining deals between traditional leaders, mining houses and politically connected BEE partners that bypass and exclude the ordinary people who live on the land. The North West provincial government is alleged to have raided the multi-million tribal accounts under its supervision but has so far refused to submit to any form of audit. The provincial administration has failed to enforce the oversight controls contained in the same laws that bestow official status on traditional leaders. The state's collusion in the diversion of community funds goes further than a failure of oversight. Recently the state-funded Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) made a R3.2-billion investment in a company in which one of the most notorious chiefs is a shareholder.

### **How rural community members respond to government policies**

In the past, rural uprisings against the Bantustans and the traditional leaders who governed them were a major component of the anti-apartheid struggle. As a result of those uprising, the transition to democracy in 1994 incorporated Bantustans into a united South Africa with a promise of equal citizenship under an integrated legal regime. Land reform to address the legacy of racially based structural dispossession was one of those promises

The Government of the 21<sup>st</sup> century wants to reverse those gains by introducing new laws and policies that seeks to betray this promise, and actually further dispossess the very people who bore the brunt of the forced removals that culminated in the consolidation of the Bantustans. These laws and policies seek to separate the former Bantustans from the rest of South Africa as zones of autocratic chiefly power, in the process transferring ownership and control of land that ordinary people have inherited over generations to traditional leaders.

The Alliance for Rural Democracy and its alliance partners supported communities who strongly opposed these new laws and policies. The rural communities perceived these laws as a return to the autocratic powers that



traditional leaders had during apartheid. In his statement, Mr Tongoane emphasised that Communal and Rights Bill was a reintroduction of apartheid boundaries, because it will only be applied to the rural villages and former homelands. A legal challenge to the Communal Land Rights Act of 2004 resulted in that Act being struck down by the Constitutional Court in 2010.

The other popular pushback was the defeat of the Traditional Courts Bill in Parliament. The Bill would have given traditional leaders far-reaching punitive powers, including the power to strip people of customary entitlements such as land rights. RWAR and the Alliance for Rural Democracy played a central role in supporting this struggle. The Bill failed when the government could not muster the support of five of the nine provinces in 2014. This was after concerted mobilisation by rural people during provincial public hearings.

ARD community activists in Bapong ba Mogale and Bakgatla ba Kgafela applied to court to demand an audit of their mining revenue and ‘tribal funds’, their legal standing to do so is challenged by traditional leaders. In the lower courts, such as the North West High Court, community activists have routinely been denied legal standing. The community activists who bring such cases are hit with crippling cost orders to pay the legal fees of those they seek to challenge.

**What is your critiques of the movements in your country.**

Fragmentation and working in silos have weakened the Southern African movements in the region. There is a lot of competition for resources and recognition for self-ego. Movements use social media to their own advantages and not for struggles of the poor, but also there is lack of accountability to the local structures and to the public. The resource needs have also led to our movements been co-opted to defeat the general need to push for redistribution of land, we find other movements using capitalist agenda, infiltrating progressive movements to derail their agenda and segregation those low income initiatives who don’t agree with their agenda. It is also difficult to bridge between the poor locals and elite movements who enjoy the attention of privilege.

There are good movements and locally initiated struggles that are doing good work in defending their land rights. To mention a few, Amadiba

Crisis Committee, Bakgatla ba Kgafela CPA, Barokologadi CPA, Calusa in Eastern Cape and Bapong. Those small communities are mostly members of the Land Access Movement of South Africa (LAMOSA)

**How strong is the Black identity movement in your country. Is it diluting or getting stronger?**

Rural mobilisation and movement building are getting stronger but goes undocumented. What to do about customary land in post-apartheid has been a longstanding terrain of contestation between landless rural communities and political elites. The issue of communal land (formerly known as Bantustans) is relatively small compared to freehold land. In the absence of land redistribution of white owned or state land, it is this land, which is governed by traditional leaders and where a large portion of the rural population lives, where the contestations between rural communities, traditional leaders and political elites has played out. Political elites should also be counted to include provincial/local leadership and the national leadership. Currently, the ANC oversees eight provinces, while the opposition DA runs Western Cape.

In general, we see different kinds of black movements emerging. We see black natural hair trending, black Africanism Sanoma movements emerging and very huge, using of herbs and alternative medicine from the mainstream popular promoted especially now during COVID-19. If I were to limit myself to land politics, I will be distracted and short sited. I am of the view that black identity movement is steadily growing faster and stronger, promoted and experienced differently by different age groups, ethnic groups, and women.

The global movement of black lives matter, black women disrupt, and others have inspired this and recently there are study groups and Pan Africanism as well as “ WE Write” forums that encourages culture of knowledge production, knowing your history etc.

**How powerful are the religious groups in your country in the social movements. Is it good or bad? Some time, people feel that radical religious groups dilute the revolutionary spirit. What is there in your country.**

Religious groups are still powerful in terms of numbers and influence. However, because most of the formally recognised churches that survived apartheid have been intellectually weak because the South African Council of churches is in alliance with elite unions such as COSATU and Government. We have seen stalwarts joining Government as Ministers, and these churches have enjoyed foreign funding at the favour of Governments. That paralysed their objective voice, but we have also experienced activist voice of stalwarts like Bishop Tutu, Barbara Hogan, Moletji Mbeki, and others.

We have heard you speaking so powerfully about Food sovereignty issues which was resisted at the Global Land Forum in Antigua by the international organisations. Why are you so passionate about Food Sovereignty and what is its difference with Food security?

So, the terminology and language used in big forums and especially where world bank and IMF are participating shapes narratives in a way that defeats the indigenous ways of survival. To me Sovereignty means autonomy but interdependence of systems to survive without depending on a system that is designed to exclude the majority from their own production spaces.

The fundamental difference between Food Security and Food Sovereignty is that Food Security seeks to address the issue of food and hunger through the current dominant food regime, whereas Food Sovereignty challenges this paradigm and seeks to build alternatives, and attempts to address the root causes through a bottom-up approach.

Food Security could mean adequate, but does not address access and control, it monopolises access, through big supermarket led redistribution where those who have no income stand to lose. whereas food sovereignty means people are in control and can choose what they eat, their access depends on the amount of work and labour they provide. This very powerful.

Anything specific which you would like to mention.

The dawn of democracy and the birth of South African Constitution 24 years ago was a ray of hope to many South Africans, yet it is still a tiny light at the end of the tunnel. The reality of the matter is that Land Reform in

South Africa has failed rural citizens and small-scale farmers. Land Reform experts has written extensively on the subject, trying to create the warning signals for our democratic government but all efforts are continuously shot down, e.g. Cousins 2015, in his chapter “Through a glass, darkly’: Towards agrarian reform in South Africa. Cousins points out to the disappointing outcomes of post-apartheid land reform and rural development policies to date – and their minimal impacts on poverty.” he further emphasises that irrespective of this disappointment, Land Reform agenda cannot be abandoned as it is the cornerstone to addressing challenges of poverty and Inequality.

In my own point of view, the objectives should be to acknowledge and redress the past injustices through a meaningful agrarian reform resulting in poor landless men and women acquiring equitable access to, ownership of and control of land, water and related resources. Fundamental access and rights to assets (such as land, housing, natural and historical resource areas and other productive resources), as well as services (health, education, water provision, nutrition, safety and security, transport, and participation in decision- making) results in substantial and qualitative sustainable livelihoods, food sovereignty and food security for all people. Through the struggles of the landless and the land- hungry men and women, economic and political power relations will shift in favour of the marginalised in society.

In conclusion, the most worrying factor is the minimal role played by the state, which should be a referee in the fight between big companies and the communities. They are fence sitting and thus giving institutions such as banks and bank companies a leeway to abuse power and repossess land if people struggle to pay. On the other hand, small scale farmers inability to manage their group dynamics contribute to their inability to use the land productive. There is no Institutional support on Governance and Management for groups, Lack of farming skills on the part of black farmers, Inability of the poor people to raise “own contribution ” money and thus lost the opportunity to benefit from the programme.

# BRUCE H. MOORE

Founding Director, International Land Coalition, a civil society  
activist Canada

*Development which is ethnically not diverse and exclude women  
is unrealistic towards progress*

Bruce Moore has been a member of the Board of Transparency International Canada, and the Advisory Board to the Institute for Global Food Security at McGill University since 2009. He has chaired the Board of the North South Institute, an international development research centre; and, served on the Boards of Canadians for Tax Fairness and the Forum for Democratic Global Governance along with the Advisory Board of the Huairou Commission, an international alliance of grassroots women's organizations. Additionally, he has been an active member of the C20, the civil society consultative body to the G20 since 2013, chairing sessions in Moscow, Istanbul and Hamburg.

From 1998-2008, he was the first Director of the, Rome-based, International Land Coalition, a global alliance of civil society, United Nations and intergovernmental organisations working in over 45 countries to empower poor rural families to gain their land and resource rights.

His civil society career, from 1973 to 1998, was as a Canadian NGO Executive Director working in partnership with developing country farmer and rural peoples organizations.

He has chaired the NGO Advisory Committee to the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development; served on the International Executive of the Society for International Development; been an advisor to the European Commission, the African Union and the World Bank; chaired policy dialogues during the UN Commission on

Sustainable Development; and served on the committee that designed the action plan for the Commission on the Legal Empowerment of the Poor.

Closer to home, Bruce is a member of the Board of the Federation of Ontario Cottagers Associations and the President of the North Frontenac Lake Association Alliance, a forum where 21 lake associations engage with other rural residents to educate and advocate for environmentally sustainable development.

**How did you join the developmental sector? What was the idea and who influenced you most.**

In 1969 I went to St Lucia to work with local youth there to build a school in a remote area where the lack of schools denied children their right to a basic education. As a university graduate I was a street worker with inner city kids from poor families in Toronto, then with youth and indigenous people in Eastern Canada. I then joined the formal development sector, first coordinating partnerships between Canadian YMCAs and Caribbean YMCAs focusing on barrio development. Many people provided me with opportunities my mother could not, giving me the view that development activists need to focus on facilitating opportunities for people to become the agents of their own development.

**What was the reason of your moving from Canada to Italy ? Was the decision easier for you or you had lots of consultation in the family related to this.**

I was approached directly by the President of IFAD then facilitating the action plan for the coalition to become the first Director of the ILC secretariat, then the Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty. The decision involved family consultation and resulted in agreeing to a two year term with the understanding that unless Anne, my wife, could pursue her profession in Italy I would not be able to stay. We were and are a two career family.

**How do you assess your work in the ILC. It has now become huge and absolutely phenomenal with diverse stakeholders and across the continents.**

My work in the ILC was no more and no less than a collective effort of many people of diverse backgrounds. I am proud that we found ways to come together and build a commitment to the importance of land and property as a crosscutting and fundamental building block for development. My view of the work was built on the pre-ILC years when I was involved on the planning committee for the 1995 Brussels conference where the coalition was established, where I was on the drafting committee for the call for a coalition focused on the revival of agrarian reform.

**Any particular incident in ILC which you would like to mention here.**

Too many, but the exciting moments almost always included times when those who resisted the ideas and *modus operandi* of the coalition started to see its merits and the need to work together.

**What are your engagement these days after the retirement from the ILC ?**

Like all my friends, including you, development is something that is not tied to any one position. When we move on and when opportunities present themselves, development becomes the driver. I have been involved in many opportunities since leaving ILC in 2008 including on the International Board of the Forum for Democratic Global Governance; as a Advisor to the Huairou Commission; on the Civil Society Engagement Group and presenter at G20 Prep meetings in Moscow, Istanbul, Hamburg; as President of the North South Institute, a Canadian development research organisation; on the Advisory Board for the Institute on Global Food Security at McGill University; on the Canadian Board of Transparency International; among others

The developmental sector is under the deep threat by the ruling governments everywhere. NGOs are being targeted as obstacles. Funds are being stopped and ways and means are being created to stop them working from human rights issues. In many countries speaking against mining, land grab invites you facing serious criminal cases. Do you think enough have been done in this regard by the International Community? What should international community do to protect organisations and individuals from being criminalised.

It is reasonable and cases exist where human rights defenders, advocacy groups and many others have been persecuted by powerful actors. Making such a comment must be made cautiously, not because it is not true, but it is unwise to make generalisation that are too wide. To my mind, international organizations, as you told me ILC did in the case of SDF, should endorse and promote the NGOs/CSOs they work with and highlight their unique and country-specific capacity to truly reach and engage the intended beneficiary communities. As you told me, this endorsement can not only lend credibility to country and community base organizations but can also lend a form of “informal security” meaning that those who may challenge or threaten local groups should know that their international affiliations and membership will bring support and resistance if they are under threat.

There seems to be three kinds of international movements. One, supported by the religious groups and donors who tend to become more right wingers and nationalists than others. The other supported by UN agencies or multilateral bodies are basically speak of bureaucratic language and 'influencing' the governments and laws. The third ones are those who are politically radical left wing and speak the language of right in terms of nationalism to protect the resources. Of course, there is fourth one, which is private sectors but it is blamed that multilateral bodies are imposing private sector on social movements who are very uncomfortable with them as they consider working with the private entities will ultimately legitimise their misdeeds and make these movement corrupt losing credibility. What is your opinion on it.

While these ways of classifying organizations is correct, I feel that it is important to recognize that countries that have been more / most successful have had a symbiotic arrangements, governed by the rule of law, that helps to put to best use the distinctive and accountable roles and relationships of the public sector, private sector and civil society.

Can you provide us your educational back ground and where did you grow up. What were your parents and how did they influence you.

My university studies were in Psychology and Organizational Behavior. I grew up in a modest to poor Canadian family in the industrial city of



Hamilton. My father died when I was very young. My mother was a strong woman, with very little education but with resilience and the power to guide her two children. She found the ways to provide me and my sister with opportunities she could not provide herself, thus my earlier comment about foster opportunities being the gateway for development

What are your suggestions regarding the issue of gender representation in the international movements. Should not it be representation of diverse ethnic groups in not only at participation level but at the governance level too. How do we do it ?

Yes development that is not ethnically, cultural diverse and that also overcomes the bias that excludes women is development that is being planned with an unrealistic view of the factors essential to progress. While overtime it is to be hoped that the racist and other historic injustices that are the basis of exclusion, these take more time than history has shown a generation can expect. As such I think the approach to be considered is rooted in the lessons learned from affirmative action and proportional representation.



# MADIODIO NIASSE

Former Director, International Land Coalition,  
Rome

*Traditional system has weakened but not out because of the  
onslaught of the modern laws*

Mr Madiodio Niasse is a leading Developmental expert on water and other natural resource management issues in Senegal. He has worked with various international bodies and had been director of International Land Coalition Rome, since 2009 to 2017. He is now based in Senegal. This is the transcription of the conversation with him on zoom.

## How is Senegal responding to Covid Crisis?

Until January government was not taking it seriously. In February and March, they realized it and after the warning from WHO, they government started taking it seriously and then lock down. There was Lack of awareness too. For the moment, level of people affected increasing dramatically. Lots of measures taken so far like food supplies though not optically done as there are leakages.

## About Senegal Model

If we compare to West Africa, we are well developed. Our universities, schools are well known. We are training people from Western and Northern Africa. We have highly qualified professors and doctors. The capacity of our hospitals is not big but until they have been developing high quality testing.

Not sure whether in the coming week we will be considered as a model as things are getting worsening now.

Theoretically Senegal has a developed informal sector. Very few people are in formal sector. Government tried to give vulnerable people cheap access to health sector. Also generic drugs are available at cheaper price but there is area for improvement.

### **Post Covid Scenario for the marginalized**

There is so much things have changed with Covid pandemic. Full lessons have to be learnt probably. For the moment, we are seeing here, vulnerable people are hardest hit. We only have three months rainy season. 70% of the families are suffering because they are farmers. That is why we have highest number of migration. We don't have quality seeds. Rural people will suffer high. During the pandemic, because of immigration, remittance from EU and US is not coming as they have been highest hit. Level of poverty suffering in rural areas and suburb is growing.

### **Migrant condition**

I found it difficult why migration had happened in India but we did not have the same in Senegal. Fact is that the government prevented people from villages to cities for the farming season. We have not seen it here.

### **Hunger or Corona**

This is a big problem because of the informal sector. Lockdown can work well when every body work in formal sector. Majority of the population is in informal sector. They work on day to day earning as they don't have the savings. They wont be able to survive in long run. Here in the Senegal the lockdown was just in the night but in the day it was done. Mosque, church and other places of worship were not closed. It was difficult to apply a 24 hour lockdown when people have to work on daily basis. The curfew here was from 8 pm to 6 am so many people said what does it imply, as if the virus work in the night only.

### **Farmer in Senegal**

Senegal is almost dry-land country. It is only, southern area wet where possibility of farming rice along the rivers. For the rest it is only seasonal agriculture. Notion of land owner does not apply much to semi-arid areas. Along the rivers, recession agriculture, access to land right is important.

There are people. Overall in Africa, it is highly different from Asia. It is due to population density relatively low or farming system extensive, level of water control, access to land is relatively open.

Access to land is more difficult. Value of land is very high in Ghana and Ivory Coast. So migrant coming from Burkina Faso, brought labour but after some time, they started claiming land rights and then crisis increased. This is not a crisis in Senegal.

Land ownership most belong to the lineage groups to access to the forest areas. You can use it but not own it technically as it does not go to individual.

Welcome the new comers, farming rights. You start to farm the land. Owner of the farming rights, can allow seasonal farming. It is complicated again. Farming season is just 3 to 4 months. After farmers right herders to have rights. They replace each other on the same land. This is the traditional ways. They need each other.

Traditional system work well when everything is traditional. Coastal regions, farming rights and traditional rights. Now the traditional mechanism of conflict resolutions is not working.

### **Women's Land Ownership**

Chief of the lineage is man. Modern system they have to record. The person is a male. They call it owner for reason of record though he is not the owner. He is just a 'trustee'. The proportion of land being owned by women is very limited.

### **Democracy**

There is a clash which is clear. Differences between French and British approach. French wanted to destroy all the traditional values and system but British respected the customary system. Ghana has worked better than Senegal. In Senegal worked modern state from the top to the bottom. Grassroots systems did not die specially when customary system is still there, pushing some people. Legal and real country. Real has the traditional system when modern system try to stifle them. Traditional system of governance system was weakened by modern onslaught but it is not ousted completely.

## Women's Land Rights

In a village generally, nationalization in rural areas, immigration has been taking place rural to urban but also going abroad. Level of feminization of farming is very high because women stays in villages. Still land is in the name of family elder in the villages. Actually, it is the in the name of elders who happen to be males.

Traditional work will not allow women to go and own land.

In terms having access to land rights, in semiarid part of Senegal it is almost irrelevant even the male don't look for title. In the irrigation system, they would request access to land, they would to it as much as possible, democratically. They won't take into consideration traditional hierarchies. They will give it to household. So if the household is led by women, they will give to women. This is the practice I have seen it here. Look at the Statistics. 90% irrigated is being under the name of men. 10% are under women because they are elder of the household. What is interesting where land transactions are allowed, when land sales increasing number of women acquires land through that process. It is taking place in the irrigation plots.

Feminists are considered as Westernised. They come with Western ideas. Women's empowerment like for example like civil courts. in marriage system, you can choose what time. Civilian system is the monogamy system. Traditional system, you are allowed to marry four wives. Feminist don't like it all. Women's access to land as individual title, if it is pushed too far, then it is too foreign to us. It is in the name of elders. It is basic to lineage group. As Western, you don't understand the local system and can bring some misunderstanding between the two. Women are overworked at household work. I don't think their image is so negative. In Senegal they have accepted the principle of parity. The parliament has 50% men and women. We have two women prime ministers and they played big roles. Senegal is a matrilineal system and women have played big role historically, even against colonization, resistance. 90% is Muslim but it is different than Arab cultural system. My own perception here is that people are, women are not that marginalized compare to Arab world. They drive car. They participate in politics, they have business in rural and urban areas. They are very active. They are travelling Dubai, China. A very striking difference compare to Arab world. Women are not secluded in the houses.

## Slave trade

People are now questioning things. Level of condemnation is not that much as it should have. It has happened here but for certain regions, we did not have it same way as in Europe and America. People, NGOs protested, government too protested. They made various statements. We did not see a citizens movement in Africa. People were still asking why that is the case. Probably, because it is happening in the time of curfew. Gathering is now allowed more than 10 percent. Level of political consciousness is limited. Most of the people really don't engage themselves with rehabilitation or black people dignity. It is a considered a remote issue from a laymen's perspective. We did not see a very big mobilization of the citizens in Senegal and Africa.

In Ghana they have started even before inviting African people to return. They had bigger island than Goree. In Ghana they recognized that many many of African American originate through these harbours, in the coast of Ghana. The current regime in Ghana wanted them to come back to Ghana easily to spent time. Many African started responding to the calls. They started coming and hence government could not stay silent but we did not see huge. We are weak politically. We don't want to anger unpredictable person like Trump. That element is there.

I visited Ankara a year ago, I visited Cape coast like Goree, the castle where slaves were sent out.

## Has Slavery ended in Africa.

Yes, It is there. Even in Senegal. If you go to some villages, there are some people who are considered traditionalist slave. Slavery system was there in tradition in many African countries It is still prevalent in many African countries. It is very much there in Mauritania. It is close to Senegal. People are marginalized because traditionally they are descendent of slaves. One of the reasons, why people don't feel or talk about it is because they played a role in it. Our ancestors were also guilty. Europeans coming and going did not discover it. It is our responsibility.

It is in the feudal system. You had a slavery system. When European came in fact, what was happening? The different kingdom were fighting each-others. The winner will take slave and keep their own country. You pay taxes. It was a system of domination. When Europeans come the winner

would take the slaves to Europeans. Europeans were not going to country side. It is the African themselves taking them. These people took slaves and sold them to European. They did not go to villages. It is people who provided.

I think the question is if you take a country like Senegal. There is some practices of slavery in some villages. The law has ended it. It is constitutionally ended but it is in the minds of people. In Senegal it is decreased a lot. It is very very marginal. During the colonial period also when the European started to come. They created big cities. In Senegal they created Four cities, Gory, Dakar, Salui ?? You live there as French citizen and became free. Many traditional slaves went to these cities, they became free and became French citizen and elite. Many of them were Indigenous people. Slavery will be found in traditional system.

Burkina Faso there is some traditional system where racism exists. In Mauritania white more having their black slaves. That is still happening. A white More. Master labor relationship is clearly a master slave relationship clearly. It is very mix racially. The north and center. They are more or less Arabs. During Saddam's party, Arab nationalism which was supporting the white people in Mauritania. They started claiming that it is the land of Arabs. It worsened after the Arab nationalist movement. White Arabs started marginalizing the black. Relationship was very friendly but that worsened the ideological movement of the Bathist. They all practice Islam yet practice racism.

### About yourself

It is a miracle. I came from a remote Senegalese village. I was sent to school. My mother's sister was a primary school teacher who convinced my parents to study. She asked my parents to send me to school. I am coming from a very poor family. After 10 years of studies, primary school. In Senegalese system you have seven years to complete to high school. After four years studies, then I became a primary school teacher. It was a training primary school teacher. When you finish primary then you have to go big cities so it was difficult. I was a primary school teacher for three years. I decided, because of the system, it allow you to go for some exams, so accepted as to go University while keeping my salary as it was important for my family. In this way, I completed masters. as I was a trained as a



teacher so I was a high school teacher for years in history, and geography before going for a doctorate. Then I went for my Ph.D. It's a great journey. I am from One of the dominant ethnic group.

### **Issue of Representation of the African or black people at International institutions**

I think it is a double-sided sword. Level of injustice is well noted. I think, what is very encouraging now that it used to be a black problem. But now young white people are also joining. That is very encouraging sign. If you don't deliver then, you will be additional weapon for the white supremacist. Important is to give them access to good education from the primary school to the University. If they are well trained then they can deal with high level position. What is happening in USA is that the young white young people have a chance to work with the black people and they are now fighting with the blacks. Now, you have to invest in excellence to bring parity. So providing reservation at highest level might be counterproductive. Don't give position at higher level just because somebody is marginalized. Invest on training, qualification. Give them a chance to be at the higher level. They need to be supported, on job training etc.

### **Your experience with ILC**

I think to me it was arrived at a moment when the coalition had a survival problem for the institution itself. ILC is a very particular type of organization. It was created in a very special circumstances in 1990s, when in the world, many of the UN convention on desertification, climate change happens. There was a universal realization that humanity needed change. Notion of coalition, multistakeholder, all bring together was the mood of the time. That also was losing some steam over the years. When I came, it was in difficulty. You needed to give some sense or reason, to continue or engage. That was a challenge. Multi-cultural team at the Secretariat. from the world bank to activist group, indigenous people's movement in Africa. It was a huge challenge. I have inherited it. I have not created it. Somebody else had played a big role. I felt that nobody would leave. All will stay together. Secondly, we expanded. All organization state and engaged with ILC all the six years I stayed there. I tried to be a conscious builder. When I left, it was solid and allowed more space for

radical engagement. It was very useful experience. I had met wonderful people. When I visited in south India. When I saw the indigenous people and when they saw me, they felt the same. We had the same color. In Philippines too, I had a great experience there. I had a great team in Rome. Very good team, everybody collaborated. It was a very good experience for me.

**Privatisation and Eviction of the marginalized is growing by authoritarian government. How important is Land Reforms? is it essential, relevant in the Post Covid world.**

I think land reform, and strengthening land governance is critical in post covid , also in order to create a basis for broad-base economic growth and for sharing prosperity in society. It is absolutely critical to strengthen governance but also ensure access of land to people. It is absolutely important. I was fascinated by China. What China has achieved in the area of giving land to people. That is one of the critical elements that happened. This is not happening here. You address land reform from two perspectives. One is to correct injustices. Where land has been distributed in a skewed or iniquitous manner, if that is allowed then society is going to worst. That is redistributive land reform. Allocate it more equitably.

Use the land to regularize. People have customary land but not acknowledged by the state. Land could be an engine for development of economic growth. Strengthen existing rights to land by the people so that the community become engaged and use the land efficiently for future. It is important to create a resilience society.

I spent a lot of time advising government. I was mobilized by UN commission on Center for Land Policy. Government Gunni was asking for land policy to guide investment in land. This does not make sense to remain poor. You have to do something. It is critically important to create condition to mobilise conditions for investment. The only investment that can take agriculture sector is a large scale foreign investment. There is a danger but there is a possibility here. There are people in diaspora who are interested in their land and supporting their communities. Critically important. Social movements, activists groups need to do, good to fight for access to land. It is not the end but starting point. Totally unacceptable,

Africa with huge resources we are still importing so much quantity of food from abroad. Find an innovative system.

### **Indigenous people's movement and concept of Indigenous people**

Do you think the issue of indigenous people is a western plot to ensure division among the marginalized.

Many people say we are all indigenous here. When you come and talk about indigenous people they don't speak on it. There are people who are not in mainstream society. depend on agriculture. They are there. Indigenous people need to manage the land, using their belief system, survival system, part of their identity.



# MICHAEL TAYLOR

Director of the global secretariat,  
International Land Coalition, Rome

Michael Taylor is the Director of the global secretariat of the International Land Coalition (ILC). ILC is hosted by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a UN Agency in Rome, Italy. Michael is a citizen of Botswana, with a PhD in Social Anthropology. He has worked on human rights and environmental issues for 30 years across Africa and the rest of the world. The International Land Coalition is a global alliance of 300 multilateral and civil society organizations based in 90 countries. Its members represent over 70 Million land-users across the globe.

**Why have Land Reforms become more important or relevant in today's time when the world faced the worst ever humanitarian crisis out of covid ?**

One thing that COVID has given us is a starker view of how unequal the world is. At the outset of the pandemic, many commentators noted how it hit the poorest the hardest. The pandemic showed up what it meant for some to be able to afford vaccines for themselves, and others not. It showed who could afford safer living conditions, and those who could not because they live in slums or the cost of not going to work for a day was too high. But as the crisis continued into its second year, it also started becoming apparent that while most people's incomes had fallen, a small number of super rich had become even richer. According to Oxfam, the ten richest men doubled their fortunes.

In this context, ILC launched our Uneven Ground report. This report laid bare the reality of inequality in land holding across the world. Using a more reliable measurement of inequality developed with Thomas Piketty's

World Inequality Lab, we found that in fact, inequality in land holdings is actually 40% higher than official statistics had previously presumed. 1% of the landowners in Latin America own 99% of the farmland. The report demonstrated that inequality in landholdings has a ripple effect across all other types of inequality. The most persistent inequality of all – that between men and women – continues to be stark when it comes to landholdings, despite a range of legislative reform over the past two decades across the world to give equal recognition to women. This aspiration is simply not turning to reality.

So, in short, the inequalities that COVID has laid bare will not be overcome without addressing the entrenched inequalities that exist in landholdings. And as land is a finite resource, such inequality cannot be addressed without redistribution of land, or land reforms. This effort must not only focus on individual or family landholdings (although in the case of women's rights to land this may be important), but also on large swathes of community land, especially for Indigenous Peoples, pastoralists and others that claim and use land as part of a local community. About 50% of the land surface of the earth is claimed by local communities as belonging to them through custom or tradition, yet only 20% of these land rights are legally recognised. Allowing local communities to defend their land rights against land grabbers through legally recognising such rights is one of the most urgent tasks we have.

**Do you think family farming and indigenous people's knowledge systems are our best ways to tackle the climate crisis ?**

Absolutely; family farming and indigenous people's knowledge systems offer us a pathway out of the climate crisis. Members of ILC have known and said this for a long time, but finally it is becoming more widely recognised. I was at the historic UNFCCC COP26 in Glasgow in 2021 with this message, alongside many representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities. Just before the summit, a consortium of donors pledged USD1.7billion to supporting the stewardship of biodiversity and natural resources by indigenous peoples and local communities. At the summit itself, this message was more prominent than it has ever been. There is a long way to go, but possibly we are beginning to see a shift in the urgency with which the world chooses to recognise the land rights of indigenous peoples and local communities. If this happens, we in ILC will

work to support it, ensuring at the same time that it is driven first and foremost a recognition of indigenous people's territorial rights simply because it's their land and the right thing to do. The fact that they are providing a service to the rest of humanity and the best way to address the existential climate crisis is important, but not the first reason why we should be recognising their land rights.

Many people had their deep apprehensions about the UN Food System summit of which you have been an important part. Those who oppose it including UN Rapporteur on right to food Michael Fakhri blame a corporate takeover of the people's issues. How do you respond to these criticisms ?

The ILC Council deliberated on whether to participate in the UNFSS, and ultimately decided that we should do so. They concluded that the world should not talk about food systems without the voices of ILC members – particularly those belonging to food producers - being heard. Ultimately many of our members participated, and pushed for more openness, transparency and recognition of the lead role of smallholder and family farmers in sustainable and resilient food production. Some ILC members chose not to participate, and the network respected their position. Ultimately we saw that indeed the UNFSS was skewed towards those most powerful in agri-food systems. This is a reflection of the reality we live in. Participating in the UNFSS was not an endorsement of these power relations we seek to change, but a means to challenge them. We still have far to go, but ILC will continue working in all spaces available to give a platform to smallholder farmers, women, indigenous peoples and pastoralists who play such an important role in feeding the world, and can't do so sustainably without their land rights being recognised.

What role can ILC play in bringing the social movements into the forefront of the land rights issues ?

ILC recently launched into its Strategy 2030, with the high ambition to provoke real progress towards the SDG indicators on land. At the centre of ILC's strategy is how we work together across our diversity to shift power. This means above all working in solidarity behind the people's organisations in our coalition. By people's organisations, we mean those that belong directly to the people who live on and from the land; the

women, youth, family and peasant farmers, indigenous peoples, pastoralists, forest dwellers, hunter-gatherers, fisher folks, afro-descendants and local communities for whom we collectively work. We commit to do that in all the ways in which we make decisions and work as a coalition. People-centred land governance is about challenging the power relations that cause and entrench inequality, and the only way we will change such systems is by doing all that we can to shift power.

We heard how you grew up in a family totally dedicated to the people's cause in Botswana. Can you share with us the extraordinary lives of your parents? What lessons can developmental activists learn from such role models ?

My parents chose to live in a small village in Botswana to work alongside the community in which they lived to support them to improve their livelihoods based on their own knowledge and customs. We grew up without electricity and running water, but we had a rich and fulfilled upbringing. That is what led me to dedicate my professional and personal life to land rights; I've seen that land and natural resources are the foundation of communities in rural areas to choose their own futures and live with dignity and wellbeing. My dad passed away at the beginning of the pandemic, not from COVID but from a scorpion sting and a healthcare system already starting to be overwhelmed by the effects of the pandemic. You can read more of his life at <https://www.mmegi.bw/opinion-analysis/obituary-of-frank-william-taylor/news>. I learnt from my parents' example how being a development activist can be a life choice that goes against what capitalism and consumerism tells us we should be striving for. This is what development is really about.

You have unambiguously explained the ILC position on the UN Food Security Summit which is extremely important as ILC being a lead network on Land Rights issues world over which involved not only Social Movements but also intergovernmental organisations as well as CSOs. Food Security issues are important but land rights movements, peasant organisations are seeking food sovereignty which is the root cause as big corporations and global NGOs are at odds with the issue. I remember the issue was discussed threadbare in GLF, Antigua and it



was raised by some of us. Officially, where does ILC stand on this issue as in the coming days more and more organisations will be making call for the same to protect the local communities and indigenous people from the onslaught of big corporations in the name of Food Security. Does ILC wish to take an independent initiative after the failure of the UNFSS ?

Following the Antigua Assembly, a decade ago, in which ILC members were unable to agree on a common position on food sovereignty, the ILC Council initiated its own reflection on the positioning. The conclusion of this exercise was that the ten commitments to People-Centred Land Governance strongly endorse the principles of food sovereignty. This is especially expressed in Commitment 2 to small scale agricultural production, Commitment 3 to diverse tenure systems, and Commitment 5 to territorial rights for indigenous peoples. While some members (especially multilateral) were hesitant to formally adopt the labels, the substance was accepted as common.

What the UNFSS showed us was that without explicit positioning in favour of small-scale food producers, any such process will be dominated by the powerful. Neutrality is clearly a myth on such an uneven playing field. ILC is committed to continuing to promote the role of smallholders in sustainable and resilient food systems, building on the opportunities created by the UN Decade of Family Farming. We will use every opportunity to act as a platform for the voices of people's organisations to be amplified.

What efforts are being made by ILC to bring the Land Reforms back on the political agenda as by your own admission they have become more relevant today in the Post Covid World.

This is ILC's mission over the next decade. In short, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals cannot be achieved by many countries without redistributive land reform. Landholdings are so unequal and landlessness is so rife that it can only be addressed by redistribution. Land rights underpin most of the SDGs, not just Goals 1, 2 and 5 that have explicit land rights indicators. ILC is working to bring awareness of the importance of land reform. It is not a historical effort, but foundational to building more equal and fair societies of the future. We carry this message globally

, as well as support our members in 30 countries where they have formed National Land Coalitions, to work for this in their own countries.

My own understanding and analysis is that it could help reduce unnecessary migration of rural poor particularly the marginalised communities to cities for petty work but then the governments have not been sincere on this. Even when the UN has declared the current decade as that of Family Farming, we do not hear much about it. I know the World Rural Forum is engaged with it but what is ILC's position on it.

Yes, land reform could help build sustainable and vibrant rural economies, giving reason for young people to remain in rural areas rather than migrate to towns where job prospects may not be good. Youth access to land is an important thrust of ILC's strategy 2030. ILC closely supported its members to promote the adoption of the UN Decade for Family Farming, and we support members in Africa, Latin America and Asia to work with Family Farming National Committees to align and strengthen our common agendas. The declaration of the Decade is a great recognition for family farmers, but it's clear that unless farmers' organisations are active, many governments are not committed to giving family farming the same support and advantages they provide to corporate agriculture

This book of conversation is a tribute to various individuals who came in touch with me during my 25 years journey in the international land rights movement. A majority of them have been with the International Land Coalition and many were part of the process before it became the International Land Coalition in 2002. That way, ILC's work actually shaped my understanding of the global movement and gave me wider ideas to implement at the local level. ILC has changed and it should but it is also important to build synergy between those so-called elderly who have experience and the young leaders. I personally feel that ILC has this wide variety of people from different streams, academics, activists, entrepreneurs, movement leaders which is definitely rare. Do you think that this wide experience and knowledge of various ILC constituents is actually not fully utilised? Wont it be good if this expertise and understanding is used to strengthen ILC globally?

ILC has always said that its greatest strength is its diversity. Diversity in membership is ILC's unique characteristic, and over time ILC has become more diverse, especially in constituencies directly representing people's organisations; farmers, women, indigenous peoples, youth, pastoralists, Dalits, and others. ILC is committed to giving these voices primacy, and for other kinds of organisations (NGOs, research centres, international organisations) to be in support of them. This is of course moving against the grain of the real world in which we live, in which the voices of the powerful (people and organisations) are the strongest, so it is a work in progress, but one to which ILC under Strategy 2030 is deeply committed.

The Land Question in South Asia cannot be addressed unless we speak about the Dalit issues and caste discrimination. While Adivasis are fighting to protect their forest rights and access to natural resources (many of them have had land too) but Dalits are historically an absolute landless community which makes them vulnerable to violence and exploitation. Most of the cases of violence perpetrated on the Dalits is because of the Land. While ILC has been very open on the issues of indigenous people and women and it is commendable, it is not so much vocal on the Dalit question. They are over 200 million in India alone, much bigger in numbers than many European countries put together. Is ILC willing to push this position or it feel it is an 'internal' question which offend the 'sensibilities' of activists and governments in South Asia.

Supporting the land struggles of marginalised populations will always offend sensibilities, but this is why ILC exists. It is true that it is not always easy, considering ILC's diversity, to make strong statements directed at individual governments. But where their actions directly undermine people-centred land governance, ILC is willing to do so. For example, in early 2022 ILC wrote an open letter to the President of Madagascar to urging his government not to institute new legislation that would have repealed a land reform programme that ILC members in Madagascar have been supporting for over a decade, and which has granted land rights to millions of peasant farmers. We have just been informed that the President has agreed to meet our members and reconsider their intended legislation. We are not yet sure of success, but this is an example of how ILC coming behind its members can exert pressure on a government. The same could

also happen in other contexts, such as for members working for Dalit land rights in India.

Climate crisis is threatening the world. We have witnessed extreme weather conditions and untimely rains and furious rivers ravaging farms and land yet rabid destruction of nature continues under various pretexts. The problem today is if we oppose unplanned or unsustainable development then we are blamed for being anti-development' working with some 'international lobby'. Everywhere democratically elected 'authoritarian' governments are doing this. Activists and organisations have no way out to protect themselves from harassment if they raise important environmental issues. Do you think there is a need to build up a UN mechanism for the protection of NGOs and activists who are threatened and intimidated by the authorities? How will they raise those issues which are extremely important to protect our lonely planet?

It is a sad fact that the heroines and heroes who stand up to defend the land rights of their communities are increasingly subject to violence, intimidation and even threats to their lives. As the ILC family meets in Jordan in 2022 for the Global Land Forum, we honour over 30 land and environment defenders from our membership alone who have been murdered since we last met in Bandung in 2018. ILC works to make this violence visible to the world, by working together with others, including the UN Commission on Human Rights, to document and publicise such atrocities and call their perpetrators to account. We support our members in each region with emergency funds to protect those who face danger because of their work to defend land rights. Through the work of members such as Global Witness, there is growing awareness of the critical work of land and environment defenders. We will continue to work with the UN system and other champions to seek protection for these brave people.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB: Asian Development Bank

AIADMK: All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam

ALRD: Association for Land Reforms and Development

ANGOC: Asian NGO Coalition for Agriculture and Rural Development

APC: Asian Peasant Coalition

APRN: Asia Pacific Research Network

APROSC: Agricultural Projects Services Centre

APWLD: Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

ARBAN: Association for Realisation of Basic Needs

ARD: Alliance for Rural Democracy

BDPC: Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre

BSK: Boo Shakti Kendra

CADT: Certificates of Ancestral Domain Titles

CARP: Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program

CDS College for Development Studies

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CERI: Campaign on Electoral Reforms in India

CHT: Chittagong Hill Tracts-

CNT: Chotanagpur Tenancy Act

CPI: Communist Party of India

CPIM: Communist Party of India ( Marxist)

CRZ: Coastal Zone Regulation

CSR: Corporate Social Responsibility

CSRC: Community Self Reliance Centre

DJS: Dalit Jagruthi Samithi

DMK: Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam

EBSAT: East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy

EPW: Economic and Political Weekly

EPZ: Export Processing Zones

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organisation

FCRA: Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act

FDJ: Feminist Development Justice.

FFF: Fasting For Food

FGM: Female Genital Mutilation

FIAN: Food first Information & Action Network International

FPIC: Free Prior Informed Consent

FPTP: First-Past-The-Post

GCC: Gulf Cooperation Council

GEAR: Growth, Economy and Redistribution Framework

GLF: Global Land Forum

HUGAFO: Hunter-gatherer Forum

IESJ: Institute for Economic and Social Justice

IFAD: International Fund for Agricultural Development

IGOS: Intergovernmental Organisation

IHEU: International Humanist and Ethical Union

ILC: International Land Coalition

ILO: International Labour Organization

IMADR: International Movement Against Racism and Discrimination  
INGOs: International Non-Governmental Organisations  
IPRA: Indigenous Peoples Rights Act  
LAMOSA: Land Access Movement of South Africa  
LDRC: Land Dispute Resolution Commission-  
LWA: Land Watch Asia  
MDM: Mid Day Meal programme  
MNREGA: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act  
MSME: Micro Small Medium Enterprise  
NCCLRP: NGO Coordination Council for Land Reform Program  
NCDHR: National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights  
NCOP: National Council of Provinces  
NES: National Engagement strategy  
NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation  
NHRC: National Human Rights Commission of India  
OBC: Other Backward Communities, a constitutional term used for Marginalised communities who are not Dalits but middle castes.  
OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development  
OPDP: Ogiek Peoples' Development Program  
PANAP: Pesticide Action Network Asia Pacific  
PCEHP: Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty  
PCFS: People's Coalition for Food Sovereignty  
PCFS: Peoples Coalition Food Sovereignty  
PLAS: Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy  
POSCO: Pohang Iron and Steel Company  
RCEP: Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership  
REDS: Rural Education Development Society

SC: Scheduled Castes a term officially-legally used for Dalits in India

SDF: Social Development Foundation

SEZ: Special Economic Zone

SPT: Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act

SRED: Society for Rural Education and Development

ST: Scheduled Tribes, a term officially-legally used for tribals in India

TERI: Tata Energy Research Institute TERI

TNDWM: Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement

TNWF: Tamil Nadu Women's Forum

UNDP: United Nation Development Programme

UNRISD: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

UPSC: Union Public Service Commission

WCARRD: World Conference for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development

WFP: World Food Programme

WHO: World Health Organisation

WTO: World Trade Organisation