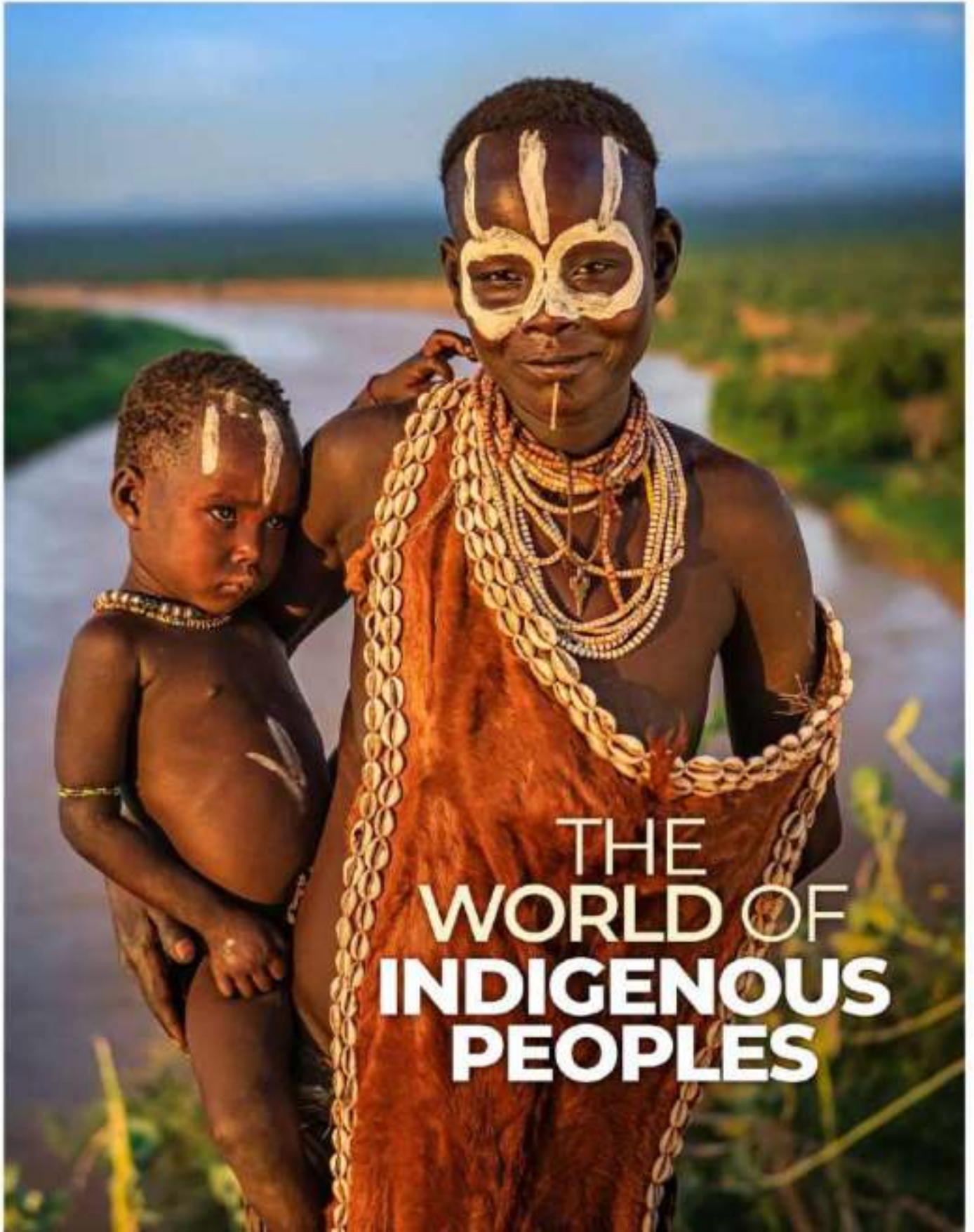


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A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation



THE
WORLD OF
INDIGENOUS
PEOPLES



A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

**We have a Mother, and that Mother is Our Territories,
Our Common Home of all the Indigenous Peoples
and everyone who Inhabits this Earth**

- Maximiliano Ferrer

General Secretary of the National Coordination of Indigenous Peoples of Panama



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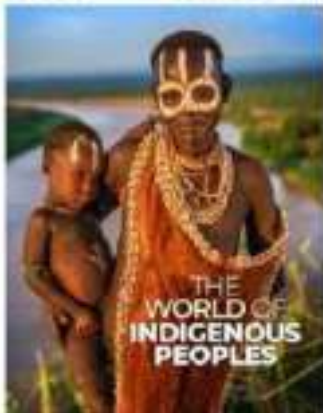
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



The Struggle of the Indigenous People

Editorial

*I*t is quite clear that the definition of an indigenous person is rather relative. Humans have been moving around on this planet right from their emergence carrying with them all varieties of flora, fauna, and other types of macro and micro-organisms. In short, globalisation is not a new phenomenon; it is as old as life itself. In this context, the question arises: can anyone claim to be truly indigenous?

On the other hand, humanity is not like a gaseous substance consisting of identical atoms or molecules governed by inflexible laws of physics or chemistry. Each human being is unique in her particularity and individuality through interacting with the environment consisting of all living and non-living beings.

It is also true that there are many different ways of classification of humans based on anthropological, sociological, political, religious, cultural, and geographic boundaries and contours imposing all sorts of identities on them. Actually, only a few of these identities endow people with self-worth and space for physical, mental, and spiritual growth. The rest lead to conflicts and violence.

It is in this context that we define an indigenous person as someone living in a geographical location for a long time comparatively. The fruits of globalisation we have already spoken about hardly touch them.

The indigenous people are physically, and geographically separate from the rest of the population. Culturally, socially, economically, and politically they are cut off from the rest of society. But the ravages of technology and economic greed stifle them violently. Many tribes are dying out, while some have become extinct. Of course, some have survived as living fossils of this tragic march of evolution of the 'modern man'.

This issue of Pax Lumina contains heart-rending stories of these human beings, our brothers, sisters, and cousins. It also raises two important questions:

One, what are the factors leading to the ruthless smothering of the indigenous people?

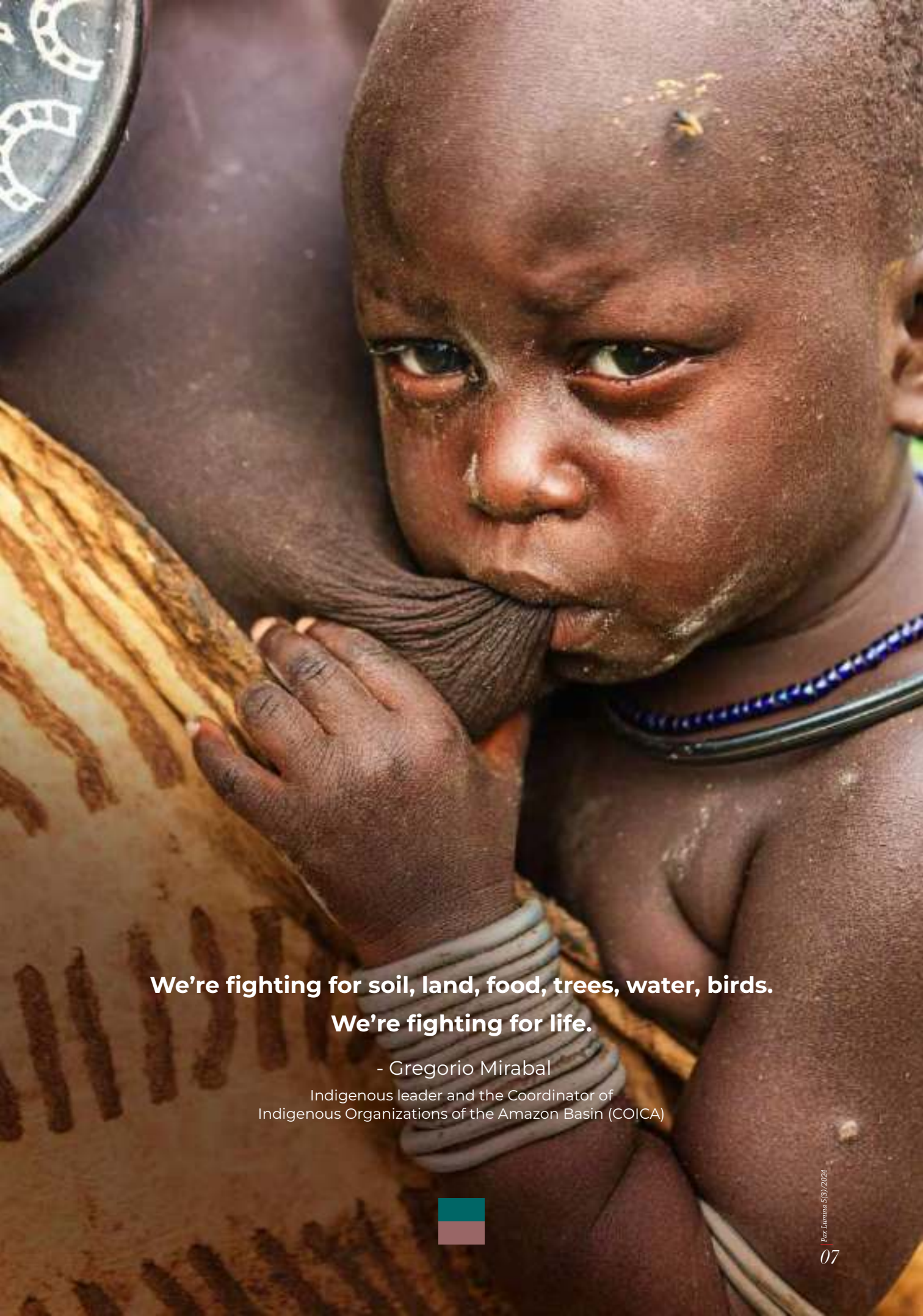
Two, do we, the rest of society, have a responsibility towards them, for their survival and flourishing and if so, why?

Let us consider the first question. The important point to note is the umbilical connection the indigenous people have to their natural environment consisting of all living and non-living beings in their immediate surroundings. We can perceive the schism that exists between an indigenous tribe, and the rest of society. The schism or fault line is so stark that the differences of colour, class, and caste in the rest of society get homogenised in the process of annihilation of the indigenous identity for the 'greater good' of modernisation and progress of society.

Indigenous people lose their land, air, water and everything around them that sustains them. Roads, dams, and mines replace trees and birds. Contractors sponsored both by the State and the private sector become undertakers in this murder of the indigenous people. They are left without political, economic, and social power. Sadly, democracy does not percolate beyond the boundaries of the existence of the indigenous people.

It is here that the second question becomes relevant. Do we who claim to be human beings sprinkled in the rest of society not have a responsibility to act while the indigenous people all around the planet are breathing their last, cut off from the land they have lived in, and the nature they have breathed. Fortunately, we find there are individuals, and civil society groups who care and you can find some of these stories in this issue. Unless people care for others around them including the indigenous persons existing on this planet, the spirit of humanity will die out. The planet will become a barren and lifeless landscape, no longer the pale blue dot it used to be in the dark abyss of the universe.

Jacob Thomas



**We're fighting for soil, land, food, trees, water, birds.
We're fighting for life.**

- Gregorio Mirabal

Indigenous leader and the Coordinator of
Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin (COICA)





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AN UNDECLARED WAR ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Around 21 villages, predominantly of Adivasis, of the Shikaripara Community Development Block of Dumka district have been threatened by displacement since these villages came under the four coal blocks allotted to ECL in 2016-17. **However, mining has not begun due to resistance from villagers.**

In January 2023, a piece of land with 50 mango trees that belonged to Margret Mary Hembrom, was dug up for extracting coal without her consent by bulldozers of Eastern Coalfields Limited (ECL), one of the subsidiaries of the public sector undertaking called Coal India Ltd.

Margret is a Santal^[1] farmer from Taljhari village, in the Boarijor community development block of Godda district of Jharkhand. Her family used to earn about ₹50,000 per annum from multi-crop cultivation (rice and pulses) and fruit trees – mango and guava.

“When bulldozers arrived, I, along with a few farmer-friends of our village, went to stop them from digging since we had not had any prior agreement,” said Margret “However, the contractors claimed that an agreement had already been made. The police, accompanying the contractor, beat and lathi-charged us. They brandished guns to threaten us.”

The villagers do not know about any agreement that ECL claims to have made. Why is the ECL Rajmahal Project so desperate to ‘manufacture’ a consent that Margret and her co-villagers do not know about? Why were they conducting a state-sponsored encroachment of Adivasis’ lands in Taljhari village without discussing adequate compensation, resettlement or rehabilitation?

Whether these questions will be answered or not, what has happened in Taljhari village is not an isolated incident. Similar and even more



severe incidents have been rampant in the Fifth Schedule Areas (FSAs) of India's central eastern States — Jharkhand, Odisha and Chhattisgarh.

Around 21 villages, predominantly of Adivasis, of the Shikaripara Community Development Block of Dumka district have been threatened by displacement since these villages came under the four coal blocks allotted to ECL in 2016-17. However, mining has not begun due to resistance from villagers.

On April 6, 2024, three villagers, all Santhals, were arrested and imprisoned. They had led a protest against a few government functionaries who had visited one of these villages, on February 20, without the village head's permission. They wanted to examine some plans related to the construction of an approach road to transport coal.

They were among the eight men named in a First Information Report (FIR) filed against villagers who had protested on February 20. The same FIR has another 100 of them mentioned as 'unknown protesters'. Mentioning 'n' number

of unknown offenders allows the police to pick up any villager at random from anywhere.

This is how the police and the district administration instil fear within the villagers. They want to contain and suppress their protest against the state's decision to advance illegal, largely unregulated and coercive extractive activities in Adivasi ethno-territories.

On September 23, 2023, a senior community leader Dasa Khor, 50, of Bhitarkota village, Maliparbat hills in Odisha, was picked up by the local police at 8.45 pm. He has been resisting the mining of bauxite from their sacred hills by the Hindalco company.

The extension of coal mines in the biodiversity-rich Hasdeo Arand region of Chhattisgarh's Surguja district has been done amidst tight police security cover. However, the local gram sabhas (village councils) have not given their consent. Insidiously, the state's legislative assembly had unanimously passed a resolution, on July 26, 2023, that mining activities will be carried out in the Hasdeo area ^[2].

Indigenous people everywhere face extinction of their distinctive social formations mainly due to accelerated demand for natural resources abundantly found within their territories.

They have been facing forceful resource grab, division within and disintegration of their societies due to multiple processes of displacement and dispossession. Largely, unregulated resource extraction has been one of the most crucial of these processes ^[3].

Central Eastern India's Chotanagpur plateau comprising hilly and forested regions (districts and sub-districts) of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Odisha have been home to several Adivasi groups who have been categorised as Scheduled Tribes.

They include Oraons, Mundas, Santals, Kharias, Hos, Gonds, Bhils, Bihars, Baigas, and Bhuiyans and so on who preferred liberty, equality, a symbiotic relationship with nature and egalitarianism to being submissive to any coercive and exploitative State-system.

They practised hunting, foraging and shifting cultivation for subsistence. This allowed them to escape and reject the enslaving grab of



This is how the police and the district administration instil fear within the villagers. **They want to contain and suppress their protest against the state's decision to advance illegal, largely unregulated and coercive extractive activities in Adivasi ethno-territories.**



Brahmanical ideology (ancient India's foundation for statecraft) which graded the members of the plains' society into 'upper' and 'lower'.

The former constituted the ruling and business classes with monarchical state systems while the latter, although in huge numbers, were coerced to submit themselves in obedience to serve the former with taxation, and corvée (unpaid labour) in the hope of being rewarded in the next birth for their dedication to their duties.

Thanks to the revolutionary humanism of the integral national movement, they succeeded in

ending British colonialism in India with non-violent resistance movements and enlightened discussions in the constituent assembly.

The Adivasis and Dalits gained special rights in post-colonial India's constitution. This was aimed to enable them to overcome many of their historically inflicted social disabilities. These special provisions and rights had also allowed them some space for preserving and promoting their distinctive socio, economic, religious and cultural values that constituted their distinctive identities.

However, the era of enlightened leadership that emerged from the national independence movement gradually vanished. Post-colonial India gradually retreated into its ancient Brahmanical ideology of statecraft found in the Vedas.

Slovenian philosopher, Slavoy Žižek said, "What we find in the Vedas is the brutal cosmology based on killing and eating: higher things kill and eat/consume lower ones, stronger eat weaker, i.e., life is a zero-sum game where one's victory is another's defeat" ^[4].

Presently, we have a situation where the Brahmanical ideology and neoliberal global capitalism jointly commandeer society and state



Presently, we have a situation where the Brahmanical ideology and neoliberal global capitalism jointly commandeer society and state in India. **Many of the hard-earned pro-people legislations and constitutional provisions meant to protect the rights of historically marginalised societies have been negated with absolute impunity in the name of 'ease of doing' business.**



in India. Many of the hard-earned pro-people legislations and constitutional provisions meant to protect the rights of historically marginalised societies have been negated with absolute impunity in the name of 'ease of doing' business.

The constitutional provisions in the Fifth and Sixth Schedules, provisions of the Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas Act 1996, the Forest Rights Act 2006 and the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, all of these provide substantial powers to district autonomous councils and gram sabhas to take control of the resources in their respective Adivasi/indigenous ethno-territories.

However, all these socio, environment-friendly and ecologically caring provisions and legislations have been grossly violated despite everyone's concerns regarding global warming, climate change and their disastrous consequences for humanity.

In this context, the Santal Adivasis of Taljhari village and numerous others in predominantly indigenous/Adivasi regions have found themselves in a precarious situation. Their elected representatives, at the village, block, district panchayats, the Members of Legislative Assembly and Members of Parliament have been abandoning them at the hands of a dangerous nexus constituted by a mostly alien, arrogant and corrupt district administration and an array of contractors that forms gangs of coal and other mineral mafia.

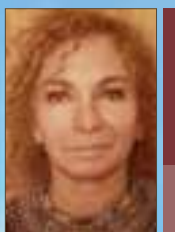
A couple of visits to Godda and Dumka districts by the 'Justice in Mining Network' (JiMN)^[5] have only served to gather such shocking information about an undeclared war going on in predominantly Adivasi/indigenous regions.

Presently, JiMN can offer a sympathetic accompaniment to locally committed leadership that would emerge which is hard to find in these two districts. In such a challenging situation, concerned citizens and the world at large must express solidarity and join in the struggle to defend Adivasi/indigenous people's struggle to survive with dignity and save our common home.

Antony Puthumattathil is Director, Bagaicha, Ranchi, India

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- [1] Santal is one of the most populous Adivasi groups (Tribes) in Jharkhand state.
 - [2] <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/chhattisgarh/amid-protests-tree-felling-for-mine-extension-in-biodiversity-rich-hasdeo-arand-in-chhattisgarh-begins-2821733> ; <https://thewire.in/rights/hasdeo-arand-deforestation-raises-questions-of-ativasi-justice-for-chhattisgarhs-first-tribal-cm>
 - [3] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iTWNomFVY8>
 - [4] Žižek, Slavoy, "The Apostate Children of God" Outlook Magazine, August 20, 2012.
 - [5] JiMN is one of the Global Ignition Advocacy Networks attempting to reach out to people affected by unjust displacement due to mining.





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RESILIENCE AND RESISTANCE

THE RARÁMURI OF REPECHIQUE DEFENDING THEIR TERRITORIES IN NORTHERN MEXICO



In many indigenous communities, people have been forced to collectively organise to protect their territories from industrial projects, invasive state infrastructure projects, and organised crime. **This defence requires organisation and creates pain and suffering, especially because it is carried out with fewer means and resources.**



In Mexico around 12 percent of the population belongs to indigenous groups. Nevertheless, their historic situation has been complex and shaped by colonisation, cultural assimilation, and discrimination. They have been forced to struggle for their rights and acknowledgement of their territories.

In the indigenous peoples' worldview, their territories are more than just the borders of the land they live on and cultivate. They are spaces where life is sustained, where relationships are formed, and where language is practised and taught. Constructing ways to imagine and perceive the world. This includes a particular relationship with the natural world and the creation of spaces where people gather and express their thankfulness for being alive.

In many indigenous communities, people have been forced to collectively organise to protect their territories from industrial projects, invasive state infrastructure projects, and organised crime. This defence requires organisation and creates pain and suffering, especially because it is carried out with fewer means and resources.

The reason people resist is to defend life itself, not just their territories, but the means to preserve life and nature for all the people who inhabit this planet. Indigenous peoples in the Americas have been forced to resist for over five hundred years.

This dynamic has been worsened by the onset of megaprojects. These are large-scale ventures in mining, oil and gas. They have a profound impact on the environment and involve massive budgets. They affect communities and towns in multiple ways. It ranges from being displaced from



When faced with the intrusion of megaprojects upon their territories, communities had to strengthen their ability to unite and act. New relationships were formed with journalists and non-governmental organisations that supported them. They came up with new defence and outreach strategies, gaining support from various organisations, the public and lawyers who promoted appeals and lawsuits that they won. The community assembly played a very important role because all decisions were made there, and people were informed. This prevented external forces from dividing them.



their ancestral lands, ecosystem degradation, disruption of traditional ways of life, alteration of social and cultural systems, and human rights violations.

Several impacts are felt immediately by the communities, but others pollute water and the environment, affecting life on the planet. For

these reasons, people are forced to engage in acts of organised resistance to defend life. Some acts of resistance are protests, land occupations, legal battles, pilgrimages, blockades and social media campaigns.

According to the indigenous worldview of the Rarámuri people, Onorúame (God Father-Mother) placed us on Earth to care for it, never considering it as a resource to be exploited. Accumulating and hoarding are frowned upon and considered unnecessary because there is trust that, if the land and what sprouts from it are cared for, there will be enough for everyone. Sharing is a very important value for the Rarámuri people.

An example of a community organisation for territory defence can be found in the community of San Elías Repechique. It had to confront the construction of a gas pipeline, an airport, and unfettered deforestation.

San Elías Repechique is a community in the Sierra Tarahumara, in the municipality of Bocoyna, Chihuahua state, in northern Mexico, located at 2368 metres above sea level. It is inhabited by the Rarámuri people.

Embarking on a territory defence process entails a series of difficulties. Fortunately, Repechique was able to have a public assembly (which refers to a gathering of community members for decision-making and problem-solving. The assembly serves as a means for community members to come together and address relevant matters) to enable unity in its organisation.

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The road they tread is long. It requires a lot of courage and perseverance despite unjust conditions and being at a disadvantage. **Despite the setbacks, they refuse to lose the conviction that they are defending the life of all species that inhabit the planet.**



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The people of Repechique established that the airport damaged their way of living in their communities because it led to deforestation, reduced rainfall leading to difficulties in planting and harvesting corn, contaminated water, blocked trails used for animal grazing and local roads, and generated air pollution which affected the health of people living there.

In the case of the airport, when the community won the appeals, it had already been built, so as compensation they were granted a trust fund of 65 million pesos. The money was supposed to be allocated to social projects.

Nevertheless, the Raramuri have not ceased to inhabit their community. They have maintained connections with other social movements,



continue to seek the means to lead a dignified life according to what is agreed upon in the assembly, and have sought support from groups outside the community. All of this has allowed them to keep resisting megaprojects, especially in defence of the forest.

The road they tread is long. It requires a lot of courage and perseverance despite unjust conditions and being at a disadvantage. Despite the setbacks, they refuse to lose the conviction that they are defending the life of all species that inhabit the planet.

These acts of resistance exist as an alternative to the exploitation of nature and people caused by laissez-faire capitalism. For these spaces to endure there needs to be a higher awareness of the struggle indigenous communities have to go through to protect their way of living.

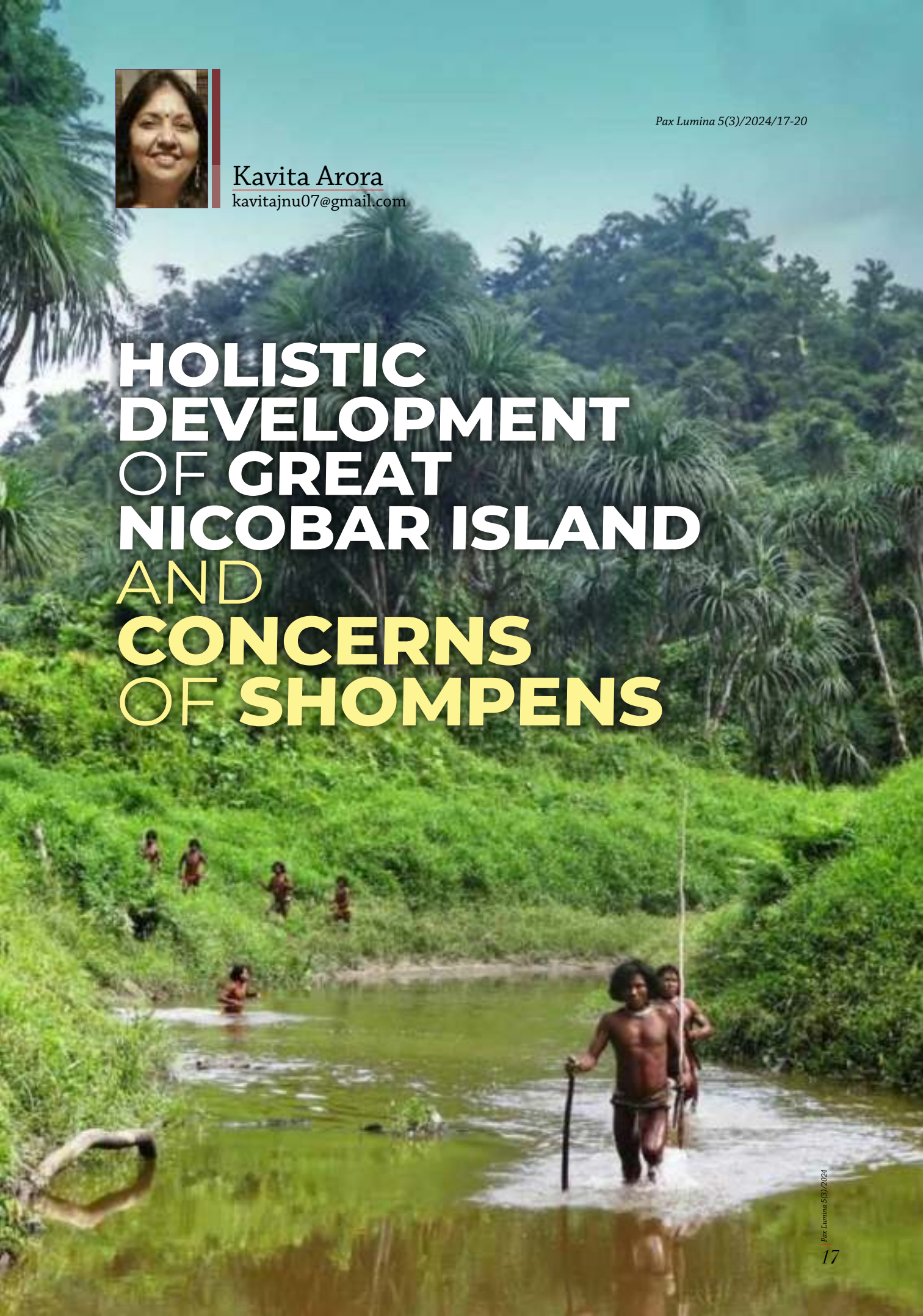
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HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF GREAT NICOBAR ISLAND AND CONCERNS OF SHOMPENS



Great Nicobar is the southernmost island of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, India. It is the largest of the Nicobar group of islands, spanning 921 km. Indira Point, on the southern tip of this island, is India's southernmost point.

Great Nicobar is home to the Shompens and Nicobarese tribal peoples. The Shompens are one of the least studied Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups in India.

Shompens live in Galathea, Alexandria, Dagmar, and Jubilee River basins, and the sea coasts. They tend to avoid contact with outsiders. Their environment is so challenging that few people enter their densely forested habitat.

In 1954, the President promulgated the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Regulation Act, 1956. This prohibits travel to the island, and any approach closer than 5 nautical miles (9.3 km), to protect the remaining tribal community from 'mainland' infectious diseases against which they likely have no acquired immunity.

The Shompens are faced with the renewed danger of incursions into their territory. Moreover, the labourers from the mainland bring with them a different culture. **Even more worrisome, they bring diseases to which the Shompens have little or no immunity. Such diseases can spread like an epidemic, as happened some years ago when diarrhoea killed a large number of the tribe.**



Unlike the major islands of the Andamans and some Nicobar Islands, Great Nicobar was, by and large, undisturbed by incursions of outsiders until the late 1960s, when the government settled 330 families of ex-servicemen in six rural areas on the southeastern coast for defence purposes. They wanted to stop the regional expansion by Indonesia.

The population influx also occurred because the Union government later sponsored a rehabilitation scheme in 1969 that primarily

aimed to address a strategic concern to populate the southern frontier.

A 51 km long North-South Road was constructed and an administrative headquarters was set up at Campbell Bay. To connect Campbell Bay, on the east to Kopenheat, the Nicobarese village on the west coast, a 43 km long East-West Road was constructed by the Border Road Organisation. Since then Shompens have come under increased pressure from new settlers in Great Nicobar, and they fear for their future survival.



The idea of just any land being equal and hence replaceable or suited for the needs of the tribals is flawed and reveals the lack of understanding about the needs of the indigenous people as well as the bio-geophysical heterogeneity of the island.

Like the Great Andamanese and the Onges of the Andaman Islands, the Shompens are a dying race being ravaged by diseases and interference in their primitive way of life.

Among their economic activities related to subsistence, the major ones are hunting, fishing, food-gathering, and pig-rearing. Hunting and fishing are mostly carried out throughout the year. The population suffers from low fertility and genetic diversity. Authoritarian and unwise policies and practices aggravate their problems. According to the census, the population of the Shompens was 212 in 1971, 223 in 1981, 131 in 1991, 398 in 2001, and 229 in 2011.

The construction and repair of the East-West Road since its inception remains a greater threat to the Shompens. This road, constructed long ago and abandoned, fell into disrepair and was not used for several decades. Since the 2004 tsunami, however, repair work on a lot of structures has been taken up, including the road.





Thus, the Shompens are faced with the renewed danger of incursions into their territory. Moreover, the labourers from the mainland bring with them a different culture. Even more worrisome, they bring diseases to which the Shompens have little or no immunity. Such diseases can spread like an epidemic, as happened some years ago when diarrhoea killed a large number of the tribe.

This shows even a limited interaction with the outside population is harmful to this dwindling tribe. A small road created dire consequences for these aboriginals. They are now facing a greater risk because their small island has become a strategic location. It is also located on the world's busiest sea route.

In 2021, looking at the island's economic and strategic importance in the Indian Ocean, and countering China's growing presence in the region, the government planned a mega infrastructure project, titled 'Holistic Development of Great Nicobar'.

This has been conceptualised by government think tank Niti Aayog and implemented by the Port Blair-based Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation. It involves the construction of a transshipment port, an international airport, a township, and a power plant.

Among several issues with the clearance is the denotification of 'tribal reserve'. An Empowered Committee of the administration recommended de-notification of the tribal reserve area.

The Andaman and Nicobar administration justified the reduction of tribal reserves by re-notifying some other land areas as tribal reserves as compensation. But the fact is that the forested and riparian regions of the proposed project area are actually foraging grounds and also contain habitations of the Shompen community.

The idea of just any land being equal and hence replaceable or suited for the needs of the tribals is flawed and reveals the lack of understanding about the needs of the indigenous people as well as the bio-geophysical heterogeneity of the island.



Academics from around the world have urged India to have a relook. They warned that it may be a death sentence for the Shompens hunter-gatherer people. Environmentalists have also voiced concerns about the impact on biodiversity and ecology.



Academics from around the world have urged India to have a relook. They warned that it may be a death sentence for the Shompen hunter-gatherer people. Environmentalists have also voiced concerns about the impact on biodiversity and ecology. Great Nicobar is known for several endemic species, including long-tailed macaques, tree shrews, and scops owls. Galathea is a nesting area for leatherback sea turtles.

The project will also affect the southern hunting and foraging grounds of the tribals along with their sacred river system. With the destruction of forests, pandanus trees, which are their most important sources of food, and rivers, their survival will be difficult.

The project is important to achieve the vision of Viksit Bharat, but the vision of development



It is expected that construction of the port in Galathea Bay could begin before the end of 2024. The port would have the capacity to handle 16m shipping containers a year and could be operational by 2028. The Ministry of Environment has already approved 850,000 trees to be felled on the island.

If the project goes ahead, a vast area of their unique rainforest will be destroyed. Around 650,000 outside people will settle there. This is a nearly 8,000 percent increase in the island population.

must also be inclusive and sustainable. The focus of a holistic development project should not only remain on the development of infrastructure, but it should also include the concerns of the survival of the primitive tribes and environment.

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TOWARDS EMANCIPATORY DEVELOPMENT

THE CONTINUING STRUGGLES OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE (ADIVASIS) OF KERALA



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At the same time, resistance and struggles against oppression have been the universal hallmark of their existence. In the process of these struggles, they have forged an identity-indigeneity, a tactical political positioning against historical and continuing oppression and exploitation.

In India, the Adivasis were able to form a Pan-Indian Adivasi identity that enabled them to connect to the global indigenous people's movement and gain support for their struggles. In Kerala, the Adivasi's agency has been gaining momentum through their continuing struggle for land. In this article I highlight how the protracted struggles of the Adivasis of Kerala, particularly, in Wayanad yielded results, albeit in a limited way, with the implementation of the Forest Rights Act 2006.

The underdevelopment and marginalisation of indigenous people the world over need to be understood as an outcome of the political economic processes into which they had been incorporated.

They participate as unequal players in these political economic processes, from a position of disadvantage consequent to the adverse incorporation. The conditions of their participation have been changing through history with the changing character of the political economy at the local, national and global levels.

Nevertheless, the adverse terms of indigenous people's participation are being exacerbated by the political economy of neoliberal globalisation, as is evident from the continued intergenerational reproduction of underdevelopment and marginalisation.

The struggle for land rights by the Adivasis have been ongoing in Kerala since the 1990s and it intensified in the early 2000s with the landmark event which came to be known as the 'Muthanga struggle' in Wayanad in 2003, which was violently suppressed by the state.

Following this, the Adivasis forcefully entered lands demarcated as government forest lands in Wayanad and other parts of Kerala and settled down as part of their larger struggle. This resulted in an impasse as the government, apparently, was at a loss as to how to address this situation.

It must be emphasised that this is a highly mobilised group of Adivasis. They are determined to claim more rights step by step.

They may be weary of the long struggles, but they are determined to claim their rights.

The people of Kerala returned the Left coalition to form the government in the 2006 elections. The new government began to explore the possibilities to resolve the Adivasi land issues. The Forest Rights Act 2006 (FRA) appeared as the last straw, so-to-speak, for addressing the land problem.

The Left government lobbied for favourable conditions such as extended cut-off dates (December 13, 2005) etc. to enable those households who had occupied forest lands to claim rights to the occupied plots.

While the FRA is applicable to the whole country, many of its provisions are not applicable in Kerala due to the specific historical-institutional context. However, there are a few provisions that could be effectively made use of for providing land rights to Adivasis.

A detailed treatment of these provisions is beyond the scope of this piece. Suffice it to say that the FRA could be applied to three categories of occupied land in Kerala:

- (1) The State-owned forest plantations of coffee, pepper and cardamom
- (2) The vested forest land, that is, private forest lands that were taken over by the State
- (3) The reserve forest lands, the fringes of which are occupied by the Adivasis.

Here I shall explain the case of a State-owned coffee plantation – the Cheeyambam in Wayanad that was occupied by the Adivasi proletariat, which is hailed as a success.

Struggles of the Adivasi Proletariat

The Cheeyambam coffee plantation in Wayanad was established in government forest land by the state with the explicit purpose of providing employment to Adivasi communities. Sixty-two workers were employed, of which the majority were Adivasis.

Most of these workers are also members of various trade unions and part of the larger trade union movement of Kerala. Inspired by the Muthanga struggle, they organised themselves and formed a 'samarasamithi' (a struggle committee). The samarasamithi took on the leadership for organising the struggle and course of action.

Based on long discussions and deliberations, the workers agreed on a fair way of dividing up the land – two acres each for permanent employees and one acre each for temporary employees. They divided the plots as agreed, constructed small houses and started living there.

Each household was responsible for managing its coffee plot, harvesting the produce and selling it. In the first year, the management tried to stop them but did not succeed due to the organised resistance from the workers. They continued living there tending to the coffee and cultivating food crops as well.

In 2008, during the time of the Left government, they applied for titles to the land under the provisions of the FRA.

They were granted the 'Record of Rights' for the plots of land they were occupying.

This is hailed as a success, as they received a record of rights over the land they occupied. Now they had security of tenure and autonomy over the produce from their plot of land. The FRA document is recognised as a legitimate document for receiving electricity connection, for registering for the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), and for applying for house number.

The household incomes have increased. It has given them livelihood security. These households have achieved a qualitative shift from being landless permanent and temporary workers in the plantation to market-oriented smallholders, i.e., petty commodity producers.

They claim that their earlier life was marred by debt. But the situation has changed since they got rights to the coffee plots. Moreover, women and elders from many of these households were able to find employment in projects under the NREGA. This was an additional source of income.

Several households have also benefited from the asset-building subsidy granted by the NREGA programme. This subsidy is available only to those who have access to land or other assets.



The children are able to continue schooling without dropping out before completing their secondary and higher secondary education.

Some households were able to acquire non-land based assets such as auto-rickshaws, and scooters. It would seem that the opportunities for socio-economic mobility of these households have improved since they received rights to land.

However, it must be pointed out that the 'Record of Rights' is not a full title deed. Though the plot of land can be inherited by the next generation, it is not transferable to non-Adivasis. They are not allowed to cut trees, not even the branches of the silver oak shade tree in the coffee plantation.

This is against the spirit of the FRA, which provides for cutting up to 75 trees per hectare for constructing houses and related purposes. The banks and other financial institutions do not accept the Record of Rights as collateral either.

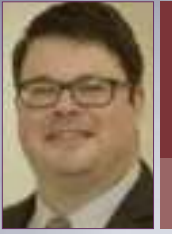
It must be emphasised that this is a highly mobilised group of Adivasis. They are determined to claim more rights step by step. They may be weary of the long struggles, but they are determined to claim their rights.

Conclusion

In these land struggles, they have not rejected the idea of development. Instead, visions of modernity have been imagined into the struggle – private property rights, focus on education, focus on socio-economic mobility and collaboration with the larger society.

Their struggle is directed towards emancipatory development. However, one recognises the limits to Adivasi agency and struggles within the constraints of their marginalised structural location. Wider political alliances with other oppressed classes and marginalised social groups are key to the success of such struggles.

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THE STRUGGLES AND RESISTANCE OF GUATEMALA'S INDIGENOUS MAYAN COMMUNITIES



Because of the pervasive legacy of colonialism, Guatemala is a divided nation that relegated its indigenous population to a state of perpetual underdevelopment. **The Maya were historically denied the opportunity to fully participate in the social, economic and political life of Guatemala.** To this day, nearly 80 percent of the Maya live in poverty. The problem of land distribution illustrates the impact of this ethno-economic divide.



Guatemala, with a population of over 18 million people, is unique. It is the only Central American country with a near-majority indigenous population. Guatemala's indigenous population is composed of the Maya, Garifuna, and Xinca peoples.

This essay focuses on the Maya. They consist of 22 subgroups and make up nearly 40 percent of the overall population.

I focus on three systemic injustices the Maya people face: land ownership, the impact of the 36-year civil war, and the ongoing environmental crisis. I also show the importance of grassroots activism and how the Catholic Church stands in solidarity with this resilient population as they struggle against oppression.

Because of the pervasive legacy of colonialism, Guatemala is a divided nation that relegated its indigenous population to a state of perpetual underdevelopment. The Maya were historically denied the opportunity to fully participate in the social, economic and political life of Guatemala. To this day, nearly 80 percent of the Maya live in poverty. The problem of land distribution illustrates the impact of this ethno-economic divide.



After the Spanish conquest, in early 1524, land was seized from the Maya and granted to the colonisers. This situation worsened with the 'Vagrancy' Law of 1878. This forced indigenous Guatemalans to perform 100 to 150 days of mandatory labour on coffee plantations. Increased concentration of land ownership continued into the 20th century. It functioned as a catalyst for the civil war that unfortunately continues to this day.

According to a 2014 report from the International Fund for Agricultural Development, about two percent of the country's elite control 65 percent of agricultural land, while 88 percent of all the farms occupy only 16 percent of the land. Over 40 percent of the rural indigenous population does not own the land that they farm.

The civil war brought immense suffering and destruction to indigenous communities. Between 1960 and 1996, the State waged war

against various insurgent groups. Between 1981 and 1983, this resulted in State-sponsored genocide of the Maya. Of the 626 massacres that occurred during the civil war, 338 were perpetrated during this genocidal period.

The Archdiocese of Guatemala's Recovery of Historical Memory Project (REMHI), documented over 52,000 cases of human rights abuses. These included rape, torture, genocide, 200,000 deaths, 50,000 forced disappearances, and the displacement of over 1.5 million people.

According to REMHI, the overwhelming majority of human rights violations were perpetuated by the State and directed against rural communities, with the Maya bearing the brunt of 83 percent of these violations.

Additionally, the indigenous communities experienced the adverse impact of climate change. According to the World Bank, Guatemala ranks ninth in the world for the level of risk associated with the effects of climate change. Yet, not everyone is equally at risk.

Indigenous communities disproportionately shoulder the burdens associated with environmental degradation. While each community is unique, they share characteristics that affect their ability to prepare for, respond to, and cope with the impact of climate change.

These include living in rural areas and relying on the surrounding environment for food, cultural practices and income. Furthermore, the Maya experience adverse socio-economic factors, such as extreme poverty and substandard housing, lack of health and community services, infrastructure, education and employment.

For indigenous communities, water has profound religious and cultural significance. Within Maya cosmology, water is a sacred gift that gives life to all of creation. Sadly, in Guatemala, there are no palatable municipal water sources due to pollution from environmental degradation.

Climate change also destabilises food security by decreasing access to traditional foods. The Maya have historically depended on a wide variety of local plants for food, medicines, and ceremonies. Unfortunately, climate change has drastically decreased the food production of smallholder farms over the past five years.

Additionally, forced migration due to climate change results in mental health complications



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because of the importance of geographic location to the Maya sense of identity. In 2005, Hurricane 'Stan' destroyed 35,000 homes leaving over 100,000 people displaced.

More recently, the double impact of Hurricanes, Eta and Iota, in 2020, displaced 230,000 people and exacerbated food insecurity for 1.8 million people. These relocations disrupt the social fabric of the communities and the sharing of traditional knowledge.

While the Maya suffer immensely from structural injustice perpetuated by the State, one key ally has been the Catholic Church. The Guatemalan Episcopal Conference (CEG) uses its privileged position to leverage its social capital in protest against the abuses of the indigenous inhabitants.

In 1971, Bishop Juan Gerardi developed an Indigenous Pastors' Encounter in his Diocese of La Verapaz in support of the indigenous priests and the promotion of Maya cultural rights.

In 1988, the pastoral letter, 'The Clamour for Land', prophetically condemned Guatemala's unjust land distribution. The CEG claimed, 'Every campesino has a natural right to possess a reasonable allotment of land where he can establish his home, work for subsistence of his family and a secure life.'

With their October 7, 2004 communication, the CEG voiced concern about Guatemala's mining practices, stating, 'We are equally concerned that life and its quality are affected by the massive ecological degradation that comes from mining with chemical and hydraulic methods that threaten the health of entire populations and their ecological environment.'

Lastly, in their '2015 Earth Day' communication, the bishops' wrote in support of the collective rights of indigenous peoples and the defence of mother earth. 'We must denounce an exclusive capitalist model the government has promoted. This violates the ancient rights of people and the land.'



This model has intensified the breakdown of community dynamics and the social fabric.’

At the grassroots level, the Maya are also agents of social change engaged in collective action. The indigenous population offers an innovative approach to community-based activism. The Maya’s traditional knowledge and practices are essential in developing collective action strategies and serve as sources of resistance to unjust structures.

For example, members of the Kaqchikel Mayan subgroup in San Lucas Tolimán have been integral in shaping the policies of the ministries of the San Lucas Mission. The Mission developed a primary school, women’s centre, coffee processing facility, and a hospital.

The indigenous people identified the need to mobilise the community and work with other institutions to make improvements in health and uplift overall well-being, and spirituality to combat the intergenerational trauma that resulted from the civil war.

Partnerships with grassroots organisations are essential to the survival of indigenous cultures. The Instituto Mesoamericano de Permacultura (IMAP) in San Lucas Tolimán trains local community members in permaculture and food sovereignty in response to the loss of land and indigenous agricultural practices.

The IMAP established an ecological education centre to promote permaculture techniques,

local biodiversity conservation, production of organic food, and a seed bank that works to reconstruct the Mayan seed heritage. The goal of IMAP is to enable ‘well-being as a result of permaculture education and ancestral knowledge, reach food sovereignty, and become self-sustaining communities safeguarding their native seeds and their local ecosystems.’

In conclusion, Guatemala’s indigenous people continue to struggle to overcome the structural injustices imposed upon them by the government. Since the Second Vatican Council, the CEG has taken a prophetic stand on behalf of the Maya and worked to support their integral human development.

Additionally, the indigenous communities become more resilient by building partnerships and coalitions with other grassroots organisations. The traditional knowledge and collective practices of the Maya are key resources for combating the structural injustice that undermines their well-being. Finally, keeping indigenous communities intact and connected to their ancestral beliefs is essential to the survival and resilience of the Maya.

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A large, black and white photograph of two Native Americans standing side-by-side. They are wearing traditional, ornate clothing, including feathered headdresses, beaded necklaces, and patterned tunics. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

BREAKING THE HEARTS OF THE **NATIVE** **PEOPLE**

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The relationship between the Jesuits and the Native Peoples of the Pacific Northwest began with a prophecy. The prophecy was old and stretched back to a time before there were any face-to-face meetings between indigenous and white people.

There were just tales passed on between peoples about these newcomers, but they had not yet ventured to this corner of North America. But the prophecies came anyway.

The prophecy spoke of men in black robes who would come to teach a new way of life. These men would offer a new understanding of the spirit world and a new kind of spiritual power. These prophecies held special sway over the

Salish, Kootenai, and Schitsu'umsh tribes, but others heard about these stories, too.

The stories brought hope, but they also foretold much more devastating things. The prophecies foretold books that contained sacred knowledge, a new morality, raising the dead, and peace among tribes.

What Native people didn't know is that the cost of this knowledge would forever alter their indigenous way of life and their traditional spirituality. In the early nineteenth century, the benefits seemed to outweigh the costs, and a world where whites would dominate this wilderness seemed laughable.

They all waited and at times searched out any newcomers to see if any of them wore black robes. They waited for over a century until a black robe finally arrived: Father Pierre Jean DeSmet, SJ.



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Pope Francis with a headdress presented to him by Indigenous leaders at Muskwa Park in Maskwacis, Alberta, Canada.

DeSmet and his companions dedicated much of their early work to the Sacred Heart and built a 'Cross of Peace' in the Rocky Mountains to symbolise the work they were engaged in. It was not a one-way street though.

The Schitsu'umsh (Coeur d'Alene Tribe) helped construct a mission church dedicated to the Sacred Heart. The church was built by Native hands. It was not built with coerced or unfree hands. It was built with love, care, and hope for a brighter future in fulfilment of the prophecies.

The problem for the Native people and the Jesuits is that this occurred a century, too late.



By the time the black robes arrived, American settlers burst across the Plains and into the fertile valleys of the Oregon Country. The tide of settlement started as a trickle but turned into a torrent. It was unstoppable. It did not stop at settlers though.

Soon the US government asserted itself into all the lives of everyone in the region including the Jesuits and the indigenous people. The government saw assimilation as the surest path to 'pacifying' the Native people of the region. If they could destroy their identity as Native and make them into mainstream Americans, the government would no longer have to take care of indigenous people.

The federal government instituted a system of boarding schools intent on wiping out Native language and culture and replacing it with English and Christianity. While tribes had not been opposed to this previously, they began to resent this forced assimilation. The Jesuits participated in this system at the behest of the government. It fractured the bonds between parents and children. It destroyed families, which is still being felt to the present day.

As the 20th century dawned and proceeded, the relationship between the Native people and the Jesuits continued to change. Native people shielded the things that they held most

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dear including their language and traditional religions. Depending on the particular Jesuit assigned to the Pacific Northwest missions, he might help preserve their culture or try to hinder it.

The Jesuit missionaries were a mixed bag. Some of them were selfless, caring, and Christ-like. Others resembled fallen angels more than men of God. What had once been the highest calling to serve in the missions — a place for the best and the brightest among the Society — became a dumping ground. The hearts of the people broke and those Jesuits who cared for them fractured, too. The hearts that were aflame with the love of Christ would harden over the course of the 20th century.

But the example of some Jesuits continued to keep the fire smouldering. The spirit was never totally quenched by the sins of the abusers since it is all-powerful. It will never leave us. The example of the Jesuits who sang our songs, danced our traditional dances, and prayed with us in our languages persisted. They cried when we cried at funerals. They laughed when we laughed at a funny story. They stood with us and we have stood by them.

Like all relationships, the one between Native people and the Jesuits has had its ups and downs. But the spirit has remained and the promise of the new way of understanding the spiritual world and the power that comes with it remains at the heart of it all.

It persists because it is the heart of God. Just as we have been here since time immemorial, so too has that Christ-like love. It keeps a sacred beat that only if we are in rhythm with it, can hear. May that spirit live on and may we always listen for it.

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INDIA AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

POLITICAL AUTONOMY AND DEMOCRATISING GOVERNANCE



Indigenous peoples (IPs) entered the hallowed precincts of the United Nations in the 1950s, initially in the International Labour Organisation (ILO), later moved upfront when the UN Economic and Social Council created the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) in 1982.

The IPs condemned ILO's Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107), the first international law on IPs applicable to the states that have ratified it, for its integrationist and assimilationist approach. Consequently, it was revised by the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169).

It recognises IPs' right to self-determination within a nation-state while setting standards for national governments regarding Indigenous peoples' economic, socio-cultural and political rights, including the right to land.

The long drawn-out battle within the UN finally gave way to a negotiated instrument between IPs and nation-states when the UN Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted in 2007.

India and Indigenous Peoples

India, an early signatory to ILO Convention 107 ratifying it in 1958, resisted ratifying ILO Convention 169, but voted in favour of the UNDRIP. India's official position is that Scheduled Tribes (STs) of India are not to be understood here as IPs; all Indians are indigenous to India.

However, for all practical purposes, STs are considered IPs internationally and are treated as IPs when it comes to complying with obligations when dealing with international institutions. Even though India's Constitution and laws

provide varying degrees of recognition to STs, India is hostile to any reference to the rights of IPs to autonomy, self-governance or self-determination.

The UNDRIP identifies IPs, without defining the term, as being the beneficiaries of the rights contained in the Declaration. The preamble refers to certain characteristics of IPs: 'consider themselves different', have faced 'historic injustices as a result of... their colonisation and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources' and 'are organising themselves for political, economic, social and cultural enhancement and to bring to an end all forms of discrimination and oppression'.

The UNDRIP identifies IPs as 'peoples' with the right to self-determination by which 'they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development (Article 3) and 'have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs' (Article 4) without any threat to the territorial integrity of sovereign and independent States (Article 46).

Restructuring Democracy and Governance: The Indian Experience and Scheduled Tribes

IPs across the world have generally traversed a different trajectory when it comes to democracy and governance. This reverberates even now in their politics and laws and is reflected in UNDRIP.

The distinct feature of many IPs, if not the most, is that they remained outside the feudal mode of production, or in its periphery, neither enslaving others nor being enslaved.

Belonging to their homelands, their ancestral domain, their collective rights over the land and its resources evolved a communitarian mode of organising society and production where the products of their physical and mental labour are collectively owned and enjoyed resulting in a relatively egalitarian structure.

Precisely for this reason, their ethos is embedded in strong notions of freedom, equality and equity within themselves that did not permit

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the emergence of a hierarchical hegemonic structure internally, the preeminent feature of mainstream society.

Pre-independence

During the reign of the princely States, the tribal regions remained outside or in the periphery, or a nominal part of the realm if within it. The rule of the monarchy rarely extended to these regions beyond collecting tributes. They were by far left to govern themselves through their customary and traditional governance systems and institutions.

The British faced persistent resistance from the IPs, unlike the mainstream who succumbed to the rule of the colonisers. Reckoning the reality of the mainstream being not amenable to notions of democratic governance and electoral democracy, the British adopted the strategy of their gradual introduction.

But then, these were simply not only inappropriate but even antithetical to the tribal realm strongly grounded in participatory democracy and their highly developed customary institutions of governance. Hence, the British tactically enacted laws to exclude them from the application of the British laws. The tribals continued their existence in a state of relative autonomy and self-governance.

The Wilkinson's Rule, 1837 in Chaibasa in the Kolhan areas of Jharkhand, legalised the traditional Manki-Munda system. The Inner Line Permit under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873 in Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Hill areas of Manipur (extended to the rest of



Manipur in 2019) and Nagaland, regulates entry of outsiders, and bars outsiders or residents of other parts of India from acquiring 'any interest in land'.

The Scheduled District Act, 1874 required extension of the laws with or without modification for them to apply to Scheduled Districts. The Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act, 1876 and the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, 1908 protected the lands of the Santals, the Mundas and Uraons. The Government of India Act, 1935 introduced provincial autonomy and elected governments in the areas declared as excluded or partially excluded areas largely inhabited by tribes.

Post-independence

The colonial laws and administration that were inherited were further refurbished, strengthened, expanded and diversified as the bulwark of governance. Institutions of democracy remained formally separated, whether at the State or the

Centre, from actual governance except in the realm of law-making and minimally linked at the ministerial level. Article 40 requires the organisation of village panchayats endowing them with such powers and authority as necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.

The first attempt to democratise governance with the institutions of democracy taking control over the administration came in 1992 with the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution on panchayats and municipalities.

About 66 to 69 percent of India's population lives in the villages covering about 90 percent of the land mass. The 73rd Amendment, except for the states of Nagaland and Mizoram, the Sixth Schedule areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Tripura, and the Hill Areas of Manipur, required 29 subjects, its functions, functionaries and funds, to be transferred to Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs), the elected institutions of democracy.

With 'local government', a subject under the State list, State laws instead brought the PRIs under the colonial administration, subverting the very intent of the amendment. 2,55,198 village panchayats, 6,706 intermediate panchayats and 665 district panchayats in 785 districts cover 6,64,580 villages.

In stark contrast, continuing their political history of struggles for autonomy, the tribals expanded and deepened democracy consistently, at least in law. The partially excluded areas were generally designated as the Fifth Schedule and

the excluded as the Sixth Schedule areas under Article 244 of the Constitution of India.

The Governors largely failed to fulfil their constitutional duties to prevent, or apply with modification the laws enacted by the Parliament or Assembly, and make regulations for peace and good government in the Fifth Schedule areas.

The 73rd Amendment required the Parliament to enact a law to extend panchayat raj with modifications to the Fifth Schedule area. The Provisions of the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) was enacted in 1996, the first law in the country that recognises and defines the power of the Gram Sabha to exercise substantial governance authority over which the structures at the higher level do not assume the powers and authority of any Panchayat at the lower level or of the Gram Sabha'.

PESA is applicable in the Scheduled Areas of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan and Telangana in 77,564 villages of 22,040 Panchayats in 664 Blocks (45 districts fully covered and 63 district partially).

The Scheduled Areas cover 11.3 percent of the total land area and 5.7 percent population of the country; 53 percent of its population are STs who constitute 35.2 percent of the total ST population of the country.

The Autonomous District Councils are constituted in the Sixth Schedule areas with legislative, judicial and executive powers over specific



The PESA framework of community-centric governance through the authority of the Gram Sabhas was elaborated and extended to all habitations accessing forest lands in all States (except Mizoram and Nagaland) and all Union Territories under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.



subjects. Ten Autonomous District Councils have been constituted, three in Assam, three in Meghalaya, one in Tripura and three in Mizoram. These cover 1.7 percent of the total land area and 0.6 percent population of the country; 60 percent of its population are STs who constitute 4.2 percent of the total ST population of the country.

14 Autonomous Councils patterned on the Sixth Schedule have been created through State laws: six in Assam, six in Manipur and two in Ladakh by the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir responding to militant political demands for autonomy, with considerably lesser autonomy. These are in addition to the general PRIs.

Article 371A in 1962 for Nagaland and Article 371G in 1986 for Mizoram provide exclusive power to the State Assembly on matters concerning religious or social practices and customary law and procedure of the concerned communities, administration of civil and criminal justice in areas covered by customary law, and ownership and transfer of land and its resources, prohibiting the application of any central law regarding ownership and transfer of land and its resources unless the State assembly resolves to apply them.

Nagaland covers 0.5 percent land area and 0.2 percent population of the country; 86.48 percent of its population is STs who constitute 1.64 percent of the total ST population. Except for Shillong, Mizoram is covered under the Sixth Schedule in addition.

16,151 traditional local bodies consisting of 13,849 Village Level, 2,288 Block Level and 14 District Level bodies (Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and West Bengal) are recognized as local government institutions.

The PESA framework of community-centric governance through the authority of the Gram Sabhas was elaborated and extended to all habitations accessing forest lands in all States (except Mizoram and Nagaland) and all Union Territories under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. At least 1,79,230 villages with a minimum potential of 40 m ha of forest land are estimated to come under its purview.

These present a picture of a high degree of autonomy at different levels in law covering 15-20 percent of land area with a population of 10-15 percent.

Significantly, as early as March 2010, recognising that tribal areas have superior laws of democratic governance, the Panchayat Raj Ministry proposed three constitutional amendments with District Councils patterned on the Sixth Schedule and Gram Sabha powers under PESA for the whole country. Perhaps it's time to take this forward.

C.R. Bijoy examines natural resource conflicts and governance issues.





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ON THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF MANIPUR



The Meiteis have had an uneasy relationship with the Kuki-Zo, as well as with the other hill tribes for decades, preceding this particular instance. **This means that Manipur has had a history of tense relations between its various constituent communities. The difference this time is that the conflict has been vitiated and exacerbated by some very specific and targeted governmental interventions.**



This month, (May), marks a year since violent clashes began to bloody the Northeastern State of Manipur. These clashes have shown no signs of abating since then. The conflict is between a group of hill tribes who are largely constituted of the Kuki-Zo people (as well as the Naga people, to some extent) on the one side and the Meitei people who occupy the plains of Imphal, on the other.

The conflict has also developed a strong communal colour, because the Kuki-Zo and the Nagas are largely Christian, while the Meitei are mainly Hindu. However, the Nagas have taken a largely 'neutral' stand in the conflict, and have been far less affected by the violence than the Kuki-Zo.

The Kuki-Zo are a minority. They constitute just 16 percent of a state with a population of a little under three million. The Meitei, constituting 53 percent of the population, are a distinct majority. The Meitei also dominate

the Government, ruled currently by the Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and led by Chief Minister Biren Singh.

The Meiteis have had an uneasy relationship with the Kuki-Zo, as well as with the other hill tribes for decades, preceding this particular instance. This means that Manipur has had a history of tense relations between its various constituent communities. The difference this time is that the conflict has been vitiated and exacerbated by some very specific and targeted governmental interventions.

Among others: first, following the military takeover in bordering Myanmar, there was a large inflow of refugees into India. The Manipur



leadership responded to this by labelling all Kuki-Zo illegal immigrants.

Second, the government began a drive to declare large tracts of hill territory, especially those belonging to the Kuki-Zo, as 'reserved' and 'protected' forests and 'wetland reserves', cancelled all land-ownership in these areas without any rehabilitation plan, and began demolitions of all structures there.

Third, in March 2023, the government inexplicably withdrew from the Suspension of Operations agreement with the various Kuki-Zo insurgent groups. It simultaneously removed the application of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) from the Imphal Valley, allowing the Meitei insurgents free reign there, while retaining AFSPA in the hills.

Fourth, in March 2023, the Manipur High Court ordered that the Meitei community be considered a Scheduled Tribe (ST). Even though the State and the various tribal stakeholders had not been heard by the court, the government did not appeal the order.

Categorising the Meitei as ST would permit them access to hill territories that were reserved for tribal communities under the Land Reform Act of Manipur (1960); the Meitei had hitherto no ownership rights in those lands.

In addition to these governmental interventions, the Biren Singh government also began a campaign against 'Narco-Terrorism' in which the Kuki-Zo community was particularly targeted as 'poppy-cultivators', although it is well-known that the illegal poppy cultivation that feeds the enormous drug trade in the region (believed to be valued at Rs 50,000 crore) is undertaken by members of all communities.

It is also reported that the Meitei rioters were supplied with weapons and ammunition by the State police. Furthermore, there is reason to believe that the relentless push towards gaining control of the tribal forest and hill territory is driven by the fact that these regions are extremely rich in oil, natural gas, uranium, platinum, limestone, chromite and other minerals, as well as possess a wealth of timber resources.

This is the context of the violence that has wracked the State for the past year. As of April 2024, the official death toll was over 200, with tens of thousands of people displaced from their homes, especially in the Imphal Valley, and sent to temporary camps, with rapidly deteriorating living and health conditions.

A fact-finding team organised by the activist Harsh Mander's 'Karwan e Mohabbat' found that, 'the government had failed to prevent the



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violence, was unable to disarm and detain the people who had instigated or participated in the violence once it broke out, and failed to bring innocent civilians to safety and establish relief camps for them, with complete provisioning of food, sanitation, healthcare and education, with particular focus on children, women and older people.’ (Sharma, 2024).

To the extent that these camps have received governmental aid, it has gone almost exclusively to the Meitei community, with the Kuki-Zo relying heavily on Catholic and Protestant churches for support.

The government’s openly partisan approach has annoyed even the otherwise ‘neutral’ Naga community. This stance is particularly dangerous in a context in which almost all the communities have clashed with each other in Manipur’s conflict-ridden past, and almost all of them have historically organised and maintained armed insurgent underground groups. The shocking silence of the Prime Minister on the current violence in Manipur, and the almost indifferent response of the Home Minister, despite numerous and repeated requests from various sections of civil society, inside and outside Manipur, has exacerbated the volatility of the situation.

The current conflagration reportedly had two major immediate causes: one was the Kuki-Zo commemoration of the Anglo-Kuki war of 1917-1919, which they celebrate with a deep sense of community pride as their anti-colonial struggle. However, this is rejected by



the Meitei as a false narrative, because the Kuki-Zo are not indigenous to Manipur but are from Myanmar, and hence did not participate in the anti-colonial struggle.

Rather paradoxically, there is simultaneously an acknowledgement of a Kuki ‘uprising’ in 1917, but it is represented as a rebellion that massacred thousands of Naga people – a position ratified by the United Naga Council. The Kuki-Zo inevitably see these as tactics to delegitimise their claims to the land. The commemoration of the Anglo-Kuki war was therefore strongly resisted by the Meitei.

The second cause came in May 2023 with widespread but baseless rumours that Meitei women had been raped and killed by Kuki-Zo men, ostensibly as part of the latter’s protests against the High Court order that would allow the Meitei access to their lands.

In response, a Meitei mob of about a thousand men, and some women, with the open complicity of the police, assaulted two Kuki-Zo women, stripped and raped them. Then they paraded them, and filmed and circulated the incident.

In this sense, a significant factor in this violence has been the role of community women's groups like the Meira Paibis of the Meitei, who have repeatedly and publicly exhorted violence, including sexual violence, against the tribal communities, and have openly protected Meitei rioters by blocking and preventing military action against them.

There are also similar reports about the widespread participation of Kuki-Zo women in protecting their communities, although not organised like the Meira Pabnis.

The Manipur case is a complex study of the politics of indigeneity. The Meitei community is reported to have been a tribal one originally, before being largely converted to Hinduism by Bengali and Assamese priests in the 18th century, CE, (although a minority of Meiteis continue to practise the indigenous Sanamahi religion).

The intersection of tribal identity with religious identity was substantially vitiated by the massive

inroads made by Hindutva organisations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), especially over the last three decades.

In a substantial departure from the Hindu majoritarian politics of the RSS in the rest of India, in Manipur, the minority Muslim Meitei are seen as neutral, while it is the (Christian) Kuki-Zo community that is seen as the enemy.

The root of the problem appears to be that the postcolonial Indian State's affirmative action policies towards tribal communities have become tacitly linked to questions of indigeneity in Manipur. The Hinduisation of the Meitei community obviated any claims it could make to the Scheduled Tribe (ST) privileges (such as access to the forest lands).

At the same time, the more recent religious radicalisation of its Hindu identity under the RSS has also brought it into conflict with the Christian communities in the hills, who happen to be largely ST.

The Meitei, therefore, seem to be caught in the cleft of two needs: one, to reassert a tribal identity that it had foregone with its Hinduisation so that it can make a stronger claim to being 'more' indigenous – and therefore, more deserving of the privileges of ST status – than the Kuki-Zo in particular.

Then there is the need to nevertheless maintain its Hindu identity, to be able to retain its connections with Hindu India, through the patronisation of the RSS and the BJP, and thus retain its position of dominance in the region.

If this is, indeed, the case, then the fires that rage in Manipur will not be quelled till these contradictory demands are resolved by the Meitei themselves, and not in isolation but in consonance with the Kuki-Zo, the Nagas, and the other minority populaces of the region.

Karen Gabriel heads the English Department at St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi. She is also the Founder-Director, Centre for Gender, Culture and Social Processes at St Stephen's College, a hospitable academic space which curates courses and encourages research. She is currently Vice Principal.





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Pax Lumina 5(3)/2024/45-48

AUTOCHTHONOUS PEOPLE IN THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO



The Republic of Congo is home to diverse ethnic groups, including those of Bantu origin and different autochthonous groups. Autochthonous people are known as the first occupants of the territory of the Central African region. However, since the invasion of the Bantu-speaking who arrived from Egypt through Nigeria, autochthonous people have become forest dwellers. They have established their dwelling place in the forests and live following the realities of the forests. That is why their rites and initiations are performed in the forest, which have become part of their life, and without these, they are lost.

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My experience concerns autochthonous people living in the northern part of the Republic of Congo, a country situated in the Centre of Africa region, sharing borders with five countries: Central Africa Republic and Cameroon in the north, the Democratic Republic of Congo in the east, Angola in the south and, Gabon in the west. The country has a long façade of the Atlantic Ocean (170 Kilometres) in deep water, making it a transitory country for the Central African Republic. It holds a vast reservoir of offshore oil and is rich in natural resources: gold, iron, and other minerals. The Republic of Congo has two sorts of vegetation: forest and savanna, but the forest covers about sixty per cent of the country's territory, increasing the living space for autochthonous people there.

In the Republic of Congo, autochthonous people are moving from the forest to the villages and from nomadic to settled life. This movement is motivated by endogenic and exogenic factors. Various governments have worked to include autochthonous people in the country's life for over fifty years. This inclusion passes through their identification and enrollment as citizens so that they can enjoy the rightful benefits



attached to their national belonging. In the process, there is an expectation that they will be in places accessible to all and where they can get all their social benefits. This and more questionable reasons, such as those advanced by conservationists and forestry industries, have made the life of autochthonous people in the forest almost impossible. The fact of removing autochthonous people from the forests, their dwelling place, puts them in a situation of transition in almost all the dimensions of their life. It is in this context that my experience among them takes place. I will share my experience following three aspects: the legal dimension, cohabitation with others, and the response to social injustices faced by autochthonous people.

The Republic of Congo is one of the rare countries with laws favouring autochthonous people in many ways. The main law on promotion and protection of the rights of autochthonous people followed the aftermath of the resolution 61/295 on the rights of indigenous peoples, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 13 September 2007. This Declaration on the “Rights of Indigenous Peoples” launched a new international context. In the Republic of Congo, the law n°5- of 25 February 2011 was adopted to contextualize and implement the rights of autochthonous people. This law is the country's first and most important legal disposition that spells out the rights of autochthonous

The realities of the so-called modern society unfold autochthonous people, but they do not have an induction into this system or implement plans for them to attend schools and gain a given level. **More significantly, their ways of life and even simple expressions of wisdom in various aspects are not learned in the country's schools, comforting the ignorance and mistrust between the Bantu and autochthonous people.**





people and expresses the willingness of the government to defend and promote them. Its promulgation brought hope and expectations. However, thirteen years later, the outcomes of this law are still very few, justifying a pessimistic attitude felt by the autochthonous people in the villages where they live now.

Obliged to share living spaces with the Bantu-speaking, who are different in their ways of life and organization, autochthonous people still face the severity of discrimination from their fellow citizens, and foreigners exploiting the equatorial rainforest in various capacities. This situation is contrary to the law of 2011 and is the source of frustration. Autochthonous people who have been forest dwellers for thousands of years and have managed it excellently. In contrast, they get everything they need from the forest. Since the increase in forest exploitation and the conservation companies, autochthonous people are no longer allowed to go into deep forests to hunt, gather, or fish. This situation increases their vulnerability, and nothing is planned for them to substitute their free access to the forests.

Autochthonous people are compelled to align themselves with the standards set by the Bantu under the pressure of Westerners. The realities of the so-called modern society unfold them, but they do not have an induction into this system or implement plans for them to attend schools and gain a given level. More significantly, their ways of life and even simple expressions of wisdom in various aspects are not learned in the country's schools, comforting the ignorance and mistrust between the Bantu and autochthonous people. This lack of understanding of their cultural values and expressions by the society at large

puts them in an uncomfortable situation, and their response to that could take any route. How do they express themselves while facing diverse situations?

One of the things that is noticeable while observing them is the way autochthonous people react while facing discrimination and other dehumanizing treatment. In the village where I am doing my research, many of them find refuge in different ways. The most common one is the consumption of alcohol, pushing some of them to drink a lot and even develop a kind of dependency on alcohol. This kind of refuge, they say, keeps them happy for a while, but in reality, it is the source of several conflictual or violent behaviours among them. Some of them have developed a very skeptical attitude towards anyone who does not belong to their community, rejecting any collaboration with outsiders. A few among them have decided instead to send their children to school in the hope of a brighter future for them.

In short, the situation of autochthonous people in the northern part of the Republic of Congo, slightly different from those in the southern part, needs genuine support. Support to demand their rights and to maintain their identity amid the changes they are undergoing. Above all, there is always a reason to hope for a brighter future, provided we all work for it now. For sure, there will never be happiness in the country unless the same opportunities are shared by everyone in the country.

Christophère Ngolele is a Jesuit from the Republic of Congo and he belongs to the West African Province.





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Pax Lumina 5(3)/2024/49-52

AESTHETIC INVOLVEMENT OF **AADI** AMONG ATTAPPADI TRIBALS



Art and culture in its purity and simplicity is still being found in tribal art expressions. Being an art expression, the tribal art forms find its roots in the seasons of nature around and their life-cycle. Tribal art forms are extremely intertwined with human and nature which indeed elevate the human consciousness to the realm of simplicity and beauty in every life situation. That's why the tribal art form is the antidote to the cultural chaos of twenty-first century towards peace and harmony.

AADI (Attappadi Adivasi Development Initiatives)

Realizing this fact AADI has been consistently aiming to promote and protect these endangered tribal art-forms of Attappadi tribes consisting of Irula, Muduka and Kurumba tribes located in the mid-eastern part of Kerala on the north-east of Palakkad. Attappadi Adivasi Development Initiative (AADI) is a creative intervention of Kerala Jesuits among the Attappadi tribes. AADI is committed to accompanying the Tribals for their integral development, preservation



and promotion of their culture, language, art forms and indigenous knowledge through various programmes since 1997. The cultural involvement of AADI has always fostered the tribal culture and art forms, thus revitalizing the tribal communities in Attapadi.

Gramotsavam

As a part of culturing a social unity among the tribal groups of Attapadi, AADI suggested the idea of 'Gramotsavam' (village festival/village level cultural gathering) which used to be cultural gatherings held annually in each of these tribal hamlets, which then brought out a new sense of unity and brotherhood among the tribes. This gave them a platform to reflect on them and to work for their rights and identity. Further, as a part of introducing the tribal cultures and heritage to the mainstream society at national level, AADI Gramotsavam evolved into National Tribal Fest.

AADI National Tribal Fest

AADI National Tribal Fest is one of the biggest achievements of AADI. Emphasising the unique art forms of tribals in Attappadi, AADI aims to showcase the ethereal and sublime richness of tribal art forms to the mainstream society through the National Tribal Fest. The aesthetic identity the art evokes among the tribes indeed increases the self-confidence of each member of the tribes. The novel quality associated with the tribal art is that it has an iconic influence for a better world. Thus, the tribal art becomes quintessential of world peace.

AADI ‘Kalasangam’ (Cultural Troupe)

AADI has formed a cultural group called AADI Kalasangam with a view to preserve and promote the performing art form called ‘Aattam Pattam’(Kummi). It is performed in the tribal hamlets during a variety of important occasions including funeral. Through regular revival activities AADI tries to make sure that this unique form of cultural dance form is carefully

handed over to the next generation in its purity. AADI Kalasangam pursuing to this goal makes the tribal community to feel self-confident.

Art Camps

Providing precise art guidance to the tribal youth through regular art workshops and art





camps, AADI enables them to dialogue with and communicate their cultural and social values with the contemporary society. The tribal youths are being given classes on drawing, painting, sculpturing and other modern art forms for wider expression of emotion and thoughts.

Art Gallery

Possessing an art gallery, AADI provides a platform for emerging tribal artists to showcase their creativity and to engage in dialogue with other established artists. This space has been used by them to get insights and diverse perspectives in the field of art. AADI art gallery is becoming a nurturing place of tribal creativity.

AADI through its cultural and aesthetic involvements tries to emphasize the cultural and artistic richness and empower the tribal communities in Attapadi challenging stereotypes and advocating for inclusivity and equality. In essence AADI as an Jesuit organisation becomes a vibrant hub of art, culture and creativity, and never fails in enriching the tribal lives and shaping collective tribal identity.

Rephin Kamal SJ is an artist. He is also the Director of AADI, Attappady, Kerala.





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Pax Lumina 5(3)/2024/53-55

THE INSPIRING JOURNEY OF DAYA BAI

ADVOCATE FOR TRIBAL WELFARE



Daya Bai, formerly known as Mercy Mathew, is an Indian social activist from Pala, Kerala, who has dedicated her life to working among the tribals of Central India. She has been residing in Barul Village in the Chhindwara District of Madhya Pradesh.

Early Life and Education

After completing her schooling, Daya Bai graduated in biology and earned an MSW (Master of Social Work), followed by a law degree from the University of Mumbai. She left Kerala at the age of 16 to become a nun. However, she later gave up convent life to work wholeheartedly for the tribals.

A Life of Service

Daya Bai identified several issues among the tribals, including illiteracy, lack of water, and inadequate medical facilities. She also found that they were subjected to various forms of exploitation. Embracing their lifestyle, she dressed and behaved like the tribals and began working for their integrated development.

Her life among the tribals has been adventurous. Like Rani Lakshmi Bai, she would ride horseback to various tribal villages. She would sleep even on roadside buildings and under bridges or culverts. On occasions when she was robbed, she would swim across nearby rivers. She leads an eco-friendly life.

Daya Bai's calling was deepened when she witnessed the suffering of the tribals who came to the Holy Mass on a rainy day, carrying their children and covering themselves with a single garment while the convent residents exuberantly celebrated Christmas. When her request to go to the tribal village was denied by the authorities, she left the convent in Bihar without completing her training.

Later, she worked as a teacher for one-and-a-half years in Mauda, a tribal area in Palamu District, Bihar, where she taught the tribals how to read and write.

Advocacy and Struggles

Daya Bai has delivered inspirational speeches, organised struggles, satyagrahas, and campaigns to press local authorities to open schools and empower neglected villagers in the interior and tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh. She was also associated with the Narmada Protection Movement.

Besides her solo struggles representing the forest dwellers and villagers in Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and West Bengal, she lent her services to the people of Bangladesh during the war for independence in 1971.

Daya Bai on Hunger Strike





Autobiography of Daya Bai (Malayalam/2018)

Community Development Initiatives

Practising the Theology of Liberation, Daya Bai set up a school in Barul Village, teaching self-reliance and then moving on to the next village. In the late 1990s, she started Self Help Groups as a tool for eradicating poverty. This naturally earned her the wrath of middlemen, moneylenders, and village chiefs.

Daya Bai is highly sought after as a motivational speaker and a visiting professor at various social and spiritual institutes.

In 2001, she received the National Award for Social Work from Dharma Bharati. Other awards include the Vanitha Woman of the Year Award in 2007 and the Good Samaritan National Award in 2012.

Art and Awareness

Daya Bai is an excellent mono actor who believes in the power of street theatre to educate the public and create awareness about social issues such as alcoholism, environmental pollution, biodiversity destruction, and communalism. She has written books, articles, and songs that are popular.

Recognition and Honours

In her efforts to organise tribals and champion their cause, Daya Bai has often been beaten up by the police. She organised a peace march from Chitrakoot to Ayodhya, where people of all faiths joined in. She stands for peace and harmony among people.

She has organised legal literacy classes for schoolchildren in tribal areas. The Honourable Justice of the Supreme Court of India Justice P.N. Bhagwati appreciated her work in these areas.

Daya Bai is highly sought after as a motivational speaker and a visiting professor at various social and spiritual institutes. In 2001, she received the National Award for Social Work from Dharma Bharati. Other awards include the Vanitha Woman of the Year Award in 2007 and the Good Samaritan National Award in 2012.

The School of Drama in Bhopal, under the cultural department of Madhya Pradesh, staged a drama based on her life story titled 'Green Fingers'. She played the lead role in the movie 'Kanthan: The Lover of Colour', which won the Kerala State Film Award for Best Film in 2018. A biopic film on Daya Bai is titled 'Daya Bai', with Bidita Bag starring as Daya Bai.

Daya Bai once said Mahatma Gandhi and Jesus Christ are her gurus, as both called for patience and tolerance. To quote Daya Bai: "Working and caring for people is no work for me. It's simply life. It is not a sacrifice. It is the only way I know for sure that I can live and be happy."

Currently, Daya Bai is focusing on the problems of endosulfan victims in Kasaragod, Kerala.

Dr. K.M. Mathew is a Faculty member at LIPI and former Professor at KUFOS, Kochi.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Pax Lumina 5(3)/2024/56

Dear Editor,

Thank you for March 2024 issue of Pax Lumina on Corrosion of Democracy.

The article on "Decentralization and Local Governance: The Kerala Way" Kerala is very interesting and insightful.

Francois Vella

Belgium

Dear Editor,

Greetings from Paris!

Congratulations to you and the Pax Lumina team for the timely issue on "Corrosion of Democracy" on the eve of the announcement of the General Elections 2024 in India and similar elections taking place in many other countries in the world this year. The articles in this issue tread the thin line on pointing out to the decline of democracy in many parts of the world and at the same time highlighting the need for democratic governance for the establishment of the rule of law and ensuring progress of all sections of society.

Denzil Fernandes

Dear Editor,

Congratulations!

Excellent articles and a very relevant and burning topic.

Vernon D'Cunha

Rome.

Dear Editor,

Thank you for the current issue of Pax Lumina on 'Corrosion of democracy.'

As usual you have done an excellent job and all the contributing and invited articles in this issue, about this very topical issue is of very high quality.

My sincere congratulations to you.

George John

Kochi.



Dear Editor,

Excellent topic!

We can not see the true version of democracy anywhere.

Democracy is declining in the US too.

Priya Unnikrishnan

Texas, USA.

Dear Editor,

Pax Lumina is great !

It is beautifully done. I read the articles; they are very well written.

Your team is doing a great work !

Jacques Ngimbous

Boston College, USA.

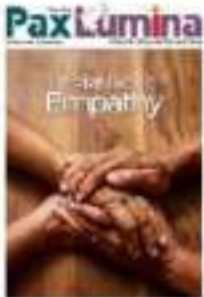
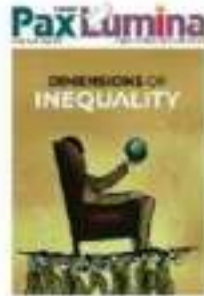
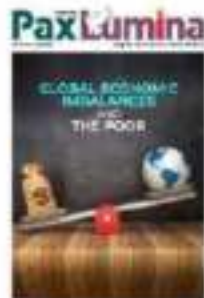
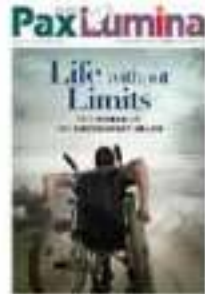
Dear Editor,

Thank you for sharing March 2024 Pax Lumina with me.

The journal publication is excellent!

John P. McGarry, S.J.

Director of Campus Ministry
Santa Clara University.



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**I do not think the measure
of a civilization is how tall its
buildings of concrete are,
but rather how well its people have
learned to relate to their
environment and fellow man.**

- Sun Bear, Chippewa

