



# Directorate of Tribal Welfare

Government of Tamil Nadu

In collaboration with

Centre for Social Justice and Equity, MSSW

Calcutta Research Group

A Workshop on

## **Food, Livelihood Security and Life Claims:**

The Indigenous People of India

**TAG Auditorium, MSSW, Egmore**

**21 September 2024**

**10.00 a.m. – 5.00 p.m.**



**Background:** *Parables and Caricatures*

There was a momentous scene in the Tamil novel “Solagar Doddi” where a matriarch of the solaga tribe with her fistful of ragi seeds started looking frenetically upon the sky and praying with these words: “whatever the guarding deity eats away; whatever the trespassers taken way; whatever the thieves stolen away; oh Madeshwara! Let the harvest be abundant”. The bounty of the harvest blessed upon the Bargur hills of Sholagas could only be matched with the bounty of the goddess gifted upon the Palamu hills of Oraons in every “kojagar” full-moon night. What made such abundance washed torrentially down and instead hunger claimed stealthily up the hills? Precisely these sorts of question were the backdrops of fictional canvas of both Buddadev Guha in Bengali and S. Balamurugan in Tamil.

“We are all asset managers”, proclaimed Partha Dasgupta in his famous review. He then proceeds farther to claim that “whether as farmers or fishers, foresters or miners, [.....], we manage the assets to which we have access, in line with our motivations as best as we can” (Dasgupta, 2021:11). If so then the tragic transition from abundance to hunger that Guha and Balamurugan vividly portrayed in their novels is perhaps attributable to what Dasgupta claims to be “a massive collective failure” on the part of tribal people in managing their god given assets. Blaming the tribal people for their abject poverty is to flaunt once again the rusted tactics of underclass theory and its associated slogan of ‘culture of poverty’.

Tribal people are endowed with their natural capital by their gods or goddesses; and precisely this divinely endowment makes forest as their “spiritual home” (Dasgupta, 2021:13). As the custodians of the forests they were once so confident of feeding not only their gods and goddesses but even feeding the frequent trespassers and thieves. What made such a lordly confidence fizzled out and trapped instead in a web of vulnerabilities? An abode of security turned into a den of pestilence?

**Context:** *From National Security to Human Security*

The archaeology of the concept of security has a curious history. Settled deep in the sedimentary layer of the disciplinary boundaries of International Relation, the discourse of security was once intertwined with the Kantian ethical principle of perpetual peace. With arrival of the realist paradigm that prioritized national interest rather than peace, the concept of security got entangled with the much malleable yet fashionable idea of nation. Thus, hyphenated either with peace or with nation, the discourse of security was largely circumferential to the geopolitical insecurities of a Modern State.



However, the contours of the security discourse got expanded when it was hyphenated with yet another concept called development. “The search for human security lies in development, not in arms” (UNDP, 1994:1), the Mahbubian turn as witnessed in the first Human Development Report 1994 made the notion of security free from the burden of Morgenthauian territoriality. The paradigmatic shift from national security to human security as articulated in the pages of Ogata and Sen Commission on Human Security and the UNDP’s special report on Human Security 2022 are the perfect props for the proposed workshop.

**Scope: Food Security and Life Claims of Indigenous People**

“Amid a vast sea of human insecurity” advancing human development with less insecurity “may appear far less puzzling” “because the patterns of development” witnessed over the centuries “inflict many of the drivers of insecurity we are confronting” now (UNDP, 2022:14). One such inflicted insecurity is food insecurity. Hunger is on the rise, reaching around 800 million people in 2020, and about 2.4 billion people now suffer food insecurity (UNDP, 2022: 5). India “continues to bear a huge burden of food and nutrition insecurity, ranking 107 out of 121 countries on the 2022 Global Hunger Index” (World Food Programme, 2024: 1). The World Food Programme claims that India is home to a quarter of all undernourished people worldwide, making the country a key focus for tackling hunger on a global scale.

Within India, it seems that sixty percent of the burden of malnutrition occurs in densely tribal populated states (SAFANSI, 2014:1) and NFHS-IV reports that more than 40% of tribal children in India are stunted and underweight and about 30% wasted (Grover, 2023). The decades of development induced displacements and migrations made the indigenous people of India vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity. The proposed workshop intends to explore the risks of food and its associated livelihood insecurities among the indigenous people of India and their struggle for life claims.

The concept of food security is multi-dimensional and covers six main domains of engagements: availability, access, utilization, stability, agency, and sustainability (McKay., et.al. 2023: 349). The workshop plans to engage with the entitlements of availability and accessibility of food and the agency of tribal people in securing these entitlements. The questions of availability, accessibility and agency will be addressed in the workshop in the following three thematic panels:

**1. Law, Vulnerability, and Justice**

This panel would map out the vulnerabilities of indigenous people particularly their vulnerability to displacement and making them as “refugees” in their own land and



susceptible to food and nutrition insecurities. Further, the panel would evaluate the existing legal regimes like National Food Security Act, 2013 and Forest Rights Act 2006 and other International Conventions on Right to Food in mitigating the vulnerability of food insecurity among the tribal population of India.

### **2. *Environmental, Human and other forms of Protection***

The second panel would take up the issues of food and nutritional insecurity of tribal people within the theoretical framework of ecological democracy and environmental justice.

### **3. *Tribal Migration & Food Insecurity in Tamil Nadu***

Migration has been one of the major coping mechanisms of tribals to escape from the livelihood insecurities. Tribal migration has peculiar pattern and migration corridors of its own. The National Tribal Migration Support Portal of Ministry of Tribal Affairs is one of the recent mechanisms to understand the dynamics of tribal migration in India. According to Census 2011, the population of the Scheduled Tribe is 7.95 lakhs which comes around 1.10% of the total population of the Tamil Nadu. Out 7.95 lakhs people, around 2.51 lakh people (31.60 percent) migrate to different places for various reason. Again, out of these 32 percent of tribal migrants, 13 percent moved with their household *en masse* and 7 percent migrated individually for some work and employment reason. This panel would explore the nature and scope of food insecurity induced tribal migration in Tamil Nadu; and how migration creates in turn nutritional insecurities among tribal migrants.

### **Objectives of the Workshop**

The proposed workshop would aim to

1. advocate the food security of tribal people by organizing public lecture;
2. critically reflect upon the factors of food and nutrition insecurities among tribal population in the backdrop of increased volume of tribal displacement and migration;
3. bring policy-makers, academics, legal experts and members of other civil society organization across a table and initiate a policy debate on tribal food and nutrition insecurities.



### **Collaborators of the Workshop**

The Directorate of Tribal Welfare is organizing the workshop in collaboration with

1. Centre for Social Justice and Equity at Madras School of Social Work, Chennai
2. Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, Kolkata

### **Participants of the Workshop**

It is expected that around 100 participants – public policy-makers, academics, activists, journalists, lawyers, students and general public, attend the public lecture organized on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2024 evening at MSSW campus from 5.00 – 7.00 p.m. Around 30 invited participants may attend the panel discussions arranged at MSSW campus on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2024 from 10.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.

### **Workshop Outcome**

1. Advocacy on tribal food and nutrition insecurities and vulnerabilities;
2. Networking of scholars and institutions;
3. Publication of books and policy briefs;

### **Reference**

Dasgupta, P. (2021). *The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review. Abridged Version.* (London: HM Treasury).

Grover, Aakriti., Anju Singh, and R. B. Singh, *Sustainable Health Through Food, Nutrition, and Lifestyle* (Springer Link, 2023)

McKay, Fiona H., Alice Sims and Paige van der Pligt, “Measuring Food Insecurity in India: A Systematic Review of the Current Evidence”, *Current Nutrition Reports* (2023) 12:349–358

The South Asia Food and Nutrition Security Initiative (SAFANSI), “Food and Nutrition Security in Tribal Areas in India”, October 2014: 1

UNDP. (1994). *Human Development Report 1994.* (New York N.Y.: Oxford University Press).