

# **TRIBAL STUDIES IN INDIA: INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES**

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**Lecture42**

**Lecture 42: Development and Tribes**

Thank you. Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Tribal Studies in India: Interdisciplinary Approaches and Perspectives. So today, we are going to understand the tribal groups and their interface with the question of development. We will discuss development vis-à-vis tribes. So before I even begin, we have this quotation by the president of India, Mr. K.R.



Narayanan. He delivered his speech on the 25th of January, 2001, on the eve of Republic Day, when he said, I quote Narayanan here: 'Let it not be said of India that this great republic, in a hurry to develop itself, is devastating the green mother earth.' and uprooting our tribal population.' So this sounds like a kind of sermon, a kind of warning by a wise president of India who says that development is definitely desirable in a developing

country like India, but that should not come at the cost of destroying the natural resources. So we should have, you know, a more farsighted vision.

**Introduction**

***"Let it not be said of India, that this great Republic in a hurry to develop itself is devastating the green mother earth and uprooting our tribal population."***

" President of India, Mr. K.R Narayanan  
25th Jan 2001 Eve of Republic Day

- According to Subhas Sharma (2010), there are several misconceptions surrounding the idea of development, making it essential to clarify what it truly isn't – to demystify it.



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We should be more farsighted while, you know, making any kind of technological or scientific intervention or any kind of new project being installed in the natural environment. We should always keep farsightedness in mind. We should not be myopic in our vision. So, according to a critic, Subash Sharma, there are several misconceptions surrounding the idea of development, and hence it becomes essential to clarify what development is and what it is not. And as a way of, you know, defining development, we need to further demystify it.

So, some of the myths surrounding the question of development are as follows. Firstly, a lot of people are convinced that development entails economic growth unilaterally and only. So, development solely means increased gross domestic product or GDP and per capita income at the cost of ignoring resource depletion and a perpetual state of inequality in society, thereby fostering a sense of discontent among the people. If economic growth occurs without considering its repercussions on the people—on the layman—then that kind of development is not very well-rounded. It is not a very welcome avatar of development.

Next, we have the Western model imitation. So, always trying to meet the benchmarks and parameters set by the West. Development is all about catching up to a universal Western capitalist industrialization model. That is another myth, another unverified fact that we corroborate time and again.

### Development Myths

- **Economic Growth Only:** Development solely means increased GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and per capita income, ignoring resource depletion and inequality.
- **Western Model Imitation:** Development is about “catching up” to a universal Western capitalist industrialisation model.
- **Purely Scientific and Measurable:** Development relies only on quantifiable scientific rationality, excluding non-measurable human values and societal well-being factors.
- **High Consumerism:** More consumption equates to more development, even for non-essential or harmful goods.



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Everything that the West does needs to be emulated, needs to be imitated by developing countries. Further, we have the myth about development being purely scientific and measurable in nature. So, the fact that development relies only and solely on quantifiable scientific rationality, excluding all kinds of non-measurable human values as well as societal well-being factors. So, development cannot be something simple. In other words, it does not speak to other contingent factors, other consequent factors, or determinants.

So development is not severed or divorced from questions that are allied with it, that are connected with it. So the human dimension needs to be taken into consideration here. Beyond the universal standards that the West has set, the specific situation of a country's own reality, own ethos, and own social and cultural factors need to be taken into consideration. And then, you know, development definitely cannot be something that happens at the cost of resource depletion and causing issues. Or spiking inequality in a society.

One more myth that we have associated with development is high consumerism. So more consumption equates to more development, even for non-essential or harmful goods. So, you know, the whole cycle of supply and demand in a consumerist society—we demand without knowing how we consume things. We demand without needing things. The demand or the desire is generated in us, thanks to a globalized kind of environment that we live in.

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Thanks to our environment, which is a product of globalization and consumerist culture being naturalized around us. So even without knowing why we need a product, we crave it. And so development... has been associated with high consumerism. The more consumerist a society we are, the more goods we need, the more materialistic we are, the more developed we ought to be.

That's a myth that is unverified and baseless. The next development myth we have pertains to big structures and projects. So, development necessitates large-scale projects, mass production, and sophisticated technology. Not really; development can also be something localized, small-scale, something that upholds and celebrates tradition, traditional knowledge, and wisdom. Therefore, it is focused on and centered around human needs or human ethos.

It is more human-centric. It is more culture-centric. It is not something automated. It is not something imposed from above by the state or by some MNC and enforced on a small group of less powerful people. So that could also be another facet of development, which we don't celebrate or acknowledge much.

**Development Myths**

- **Big Structures/Projects:** Development necessitates large-scale projects, mass production, and sophisticated technology.
- **Inevitable Globalisation:** More and faster development is solely a result of globalisation, making it unavoidable.
- **Upper Echelon Change:** Development primarily means changing the lives of the already privileged segments of society.
- **Visible Concrete Structures:** Development is solely about visible infrastructure like roads and buildings (concrete jungles).



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For us, according to the general myth in society, development is all about big structures and big projects. However, large-scale projects, as I said earlier, tend to bulldoze the concerns, questions, or demands that arise from locals, smaller societies, small economies, and small startups, right? The next myth we have about development is inevitable globalization. So everything we do, all small startups, all small endeavors, should merge into one.

the inevitable trend of globalization. Everything is globalization facing. Everything is engulfed ultimately by globalization. So more and faster development is solely a result of globalization and globalization ultimately is unavoidable. When we say that once again we are bulldozing the localized realities, the more specific small scale realities, the realities of the grassroots people, something that is whose coordinates can be identified among ordinary people, ordinary activities.

And when we merge our localized realities, our smaller projects with the larger trends of globalization, we engulf these individual efforts, these localized efforts. And every time I talk of localized efforts in the context of tribal studies, We have a perpetually marginalized subject, human subject, the tribal people who are at the periphery of any given scheme. So any endeavor that centers them, that keeps the tribal people in their mind, in its mind, or any project that, you know, is drawing basically on tribalization would not really like to merge itself with the globalizing trends or the larger globalization process. It may draw

on some of the trends, but it may not want to be engulfed or be entirely absorbed by globalization. It may want to survive as a separate entity in its own rights. Now, the next myth that we have is pertaining to the upper echelon change. So, development primarily

means changing the lives of the already privileged segments of society. That's precisely what has been happening and that is how the large-scale projects tend to change a society.

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When we bring about changes, it tends to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. So development does not talk about an equitable society. It doesn't talk about equity, about fairness, about symmetrical access to resources, at least to some extent. I mean, this is another myth that we have.

Development should always be something that affects society. and improves the already privileged sections or segments of society. Development has got to do only with the upper echelons of any given society. How about the grassroots people? How about the people who are in the lowest rung of the ladder, who are already disadvantaged?

We assume that these people are disposable. So that's the very dangerous phase of development that we need to avoid, that we need to problematize. where development comes like a juggernaut force. It comes like a force, unstoppable force, that crashes people as disposable, as non-entities, just because they don't have any social, any cultural, economic capital.

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People who are without capital. So, that kind of development myth needs to be revisited. Next, visible concrete structures. So, what is development? Development is in the form of some material deliverables.

At the end of any development, as the myth goes, there has to be some visible infrastructure, such as roads and buildings. So, the more developed—supposedly developed—structures, the more it should turn into concrete jungles, even if at the cost of, you know, threatening and destabilizing, jeopardizing the ecology, the ecosystem. So, development, alternatively, you know, need not be something very visible, very immediate, very, you know, palpable, but something that bears fruit in the future in the form of conservation, in the form of education, in the form of building a generation of people

you know, as future leaders, as future path showers, or people who set trends in terms of good ideas, good practices. But that is not something we include in our discussion of development. Development is something that needs to come in the form of deliverables immediately ready for consumption, immediately ready to be served to humanity, and that to the privileged section of humanity, in the form of roads, dams, buildings. And we forget to question what we are passing on.

or what we are bequeathing to the next generation, to the future. The next development myth that we have is that government or external actors can only bring about development. So development can only be initiated and funded by government bodies, international agencies, multinational corporations, or national corporate capitalists. We tend to overlook the assets that we have in localized bodies, the human power, the power or the assets of cultural knowledge that we have in each small-scale society, right? How

they can bring about changes, you know, which are customized according to their own needs.

**Development Myths**

- **Government/External Actors Only:** Development can only be initiated and funded by government bodies, international agencies, MNCs, or national corporate capitalists.
- **External Language (English):** The language of development must be typically English.
- **Immediate Phenomenon:** Development is an immediate, "here and now" occurrence, and may not necessarily own the responsibility of future.
- **Optimum Resource Exploitation:** Development requires and necessitates the maximum utilization and exploitation of natural resources, assuming they are abundant and infinite, endorsing a myopic vision.



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So when changes are brought about in a society from outside, as something external to the society, those changes tend to bulldoze the realities of that society. When the government or some external agent, some MNC, tries to do a project in tribal land, they don't ask for whether the tribals need development through modernization, urbanization, or rather they would like the land to propagate, to celebrate its tribal culture. They need tribalization rather.

They need development through tribalization. They need, you know, they seek, you know, recognition through tribalization. They need respect and dignity for the tribal entity. They're tribal beings, right? So it's not really true that external actors can only bring about development.

Sometimes, conversely, such external actors are seen as a bane rather than a boon to a given society. Next, the concept of using English, the English as an external language, that becomes a tool of development. The language of development must be typically English. Although English is a language that in the post-colonial reality setting today we cannot call as entirely a foreign language. Now we have the Indianized version of English and English also tends to be a language that

acts as glue, keeping the Indian society or India as a community together. A land that has so many different languages, so many different cultures, practices and religions, English tends to act as glue. However, English cannot be the measuring scale or the parameter for understanding or for judging how developed a person is, how advanced a society is. Another development myth that we have is the immediate phenomenon. So

understanding development as an immediate here and now occurrence and not necessarily owning the responsibility of future.

So not owning the guilt for the damage that we are doing to our environment. Right. No accountability. Just being myopic, just being, you know, very complacent and consuming everything that we can. Probably a word we have here is hedonism.

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So not thinking about long term goals or not thinking about long term benefits that would be reaped by the future generations. Further, another development myth that we have is pertaining to optimum resource exploitation. So, thinking that development requires and entails the maximum utilization and exploitation of natural resources, assuming that they are abundant and infinite and thereby endorsing a myopic vision. So, this is something I have already talked about. a very utilitarian attitude or approach towards nature and environment, exploiting natural resources, imagining falsely that they are abandoned, they are infinite, they would never perish.

And so we are endorsing a myopic vision. We don't think about the future of the planet. The concept of development is thus laden with so many myths originating primarily from the Western and specifically Eurocentric perspectives, capitalist corporations, development and lobbies, and a deep-rooted consumerist culture. Such myths heavily rely on market forces assuming the rational choices are driven by a supply and demand chain, which tends to determine the economic outcomes entirely.

On the converse, such myths centering development disregard crucial non-economic factors such as social and moral values, gender and environmental factors, a general quality of life that development can give us, socio-cultural contexts, local attitudes, as well as the indigenous knowledge systems and how such knowledge systems interact

with or interface with technology, medicine, education, and the question of oral traditions. despite their significant historical and civilizational contributions, we don't. Think of, you know, development in terms of preservation of our indigenous knowledge, our indigenous practices, their contribution to medicine, their contribution to education and how oral traditions in general can enhance and contribute to our civilization. Right.

**Development Myths**

- The concept of development is laden with myths originating primarily from Western (Eurocentric) perspectives, capitalist corporations, development aid lobbies, and consumer culture. It heavily relies on market forces, assuming rational choices driven by supply and demand determine economic outcomes.
- However, these myths disregard crucial non-economic factors like social and moral values, gender and environmental aspects, quality of life, socio-cultural contexts, local attitudes, and indigenous knowledge systems in technology, medicine, education, and oral traditions, despite their significant historical and civilizational contributions (Sharma, 2010).



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To our history. So that is also development. In terms of enhancing scholarship and broadening human knowledge, but that does not have an immediate effect. Preservation of oral culture and preservation of Indian knowledge systems do not have an immediate effect. It cannot be measured in materialistic terms.

So we don't value them usually. So we have this documentary film titled 'Development Flows from the Barrel of the Gun.' 'Development Flows from the Barrel of the Gun.' 'Vikas Bandukke Naal Se.' It's a film that was made in 2003 by the National Award-winning documentary filmmakers Biju Topo and Meghnath.

This film is crucial in understanding development and its consequences on tribal communities. The subject of this film, 'Vikas Banduk Kenal Se,' is the illegal displacement of entire villages by state-driven, state-sponsored projects and interventions. It illustrates the injustices and inequities faced by India's Adivasi population as a consequence of biased development policies. This film covers cases from Utkal Alumina in Kashyapur, Odisha, the Koel Karo Dam in Jharkhand, a World Bank-financed forestry project in Devas, Madhya Pradesh, a steel plant in Nagarnar, Chhattisgarh, and the port in Umbergaon, Gujarat.

So here we have an excerpt from the movie Development Flows. From the barrel of the gun. We see people have gathered in protest against the displacement of the Adivasi

population in the name of development. Real social development, according to Sharma, should fundamentally involve the following. One, integrating and adapting indigenous knowledge, knowledge systems, and practices.



Second, utilizing local resources and fostering local initiatives. So recognizing the local people's wisdom. What we tend to do is occupy their land and turn them into, you know, mindless laborers, working hands in their own land. So probably the ancient wisdom that is at the heart of their community can teach us a thing or two.

So rather than just treat them as working hands, we can, you know, foster, incorporate their initiatives, and include ideas from the local people, who understand the dynamics of that land and are much better at managing nature than urban people. The third point that Sharma proposes here pertains to collective empowerment and participation. So working with the tribal people and not for the tribal people.

When we have the latter in our mind, when the latter becomes a frame of reference, there is complacency involved. There is a consciousness that we, as non-tribals, as mainstream people, are superior to the tribals and that we have something to offer and nothing to learn from them. So the basic, you know, starting point is from a hierarchical relationship where the mainstream people are naturally assumed to be higher and more privileged than the tribal people. And, as I was saying, we do not assume, we do not even imagine that we have a thing or two to learn, that we could learn from the indigenous people.

So working with the indigenous people, on the other hand, keeps us open-minded, keeps us grateful for what we are learning from them. It is an approach that is more inclusive in nature, a participation-oriented approach. which tends to give visibility to all, recognition to all, and which is willing to become something that results in additive knowledge. Such

a participatory approach, such an inclusive approach, enables additive, cumulative knowledge, simultaneous knowledge. So I come to a tribal society with some frame of mind, with some paradigm, with some training that I have beforehand, but because I'm open,

and I have the humility and the curiosity to learn, my knowledge becomes cumulative. I'm adding something more to my existing repertoire of knowledge, and it enriches my consciousness thereby. So collective empowerment, collective participation, knowledge enhances through exchange, through including everyone. And it is a mutual process. It also becomes additive and cumulative on the part of the tribal people.

**Development and Tribes**

- **Real social development**, states Sharma (2010), fundamentally involves:
- Integrating and adapting indigenous knowledge.
- Utilizing local resources and fostering local initiative.
- Collective empowerment and participation (working "with," not "for" the people).
- Applying a "think globally, act locally" approach.
- Achieving comprehensive agricultural sustainability in agrarian contexts.





Next, Sharma talks about development in terms of applying a 'think globally, act locally' approach, right? So although we have the global frame of mind or the global perspective in our minds, we should act at the local level—the specific localized realities, the many stories that each society has to tell us, their specific experiences, their specific crises, their specific struggles, and stories cannot be overlooked when we are trying to pitch development in their society. Next is achieving comprehensive agricultural sustainability in agrarian contexts. Right?

When we talk about agricultural sustainability in agrarian contexts, once again, it is very fruitful to consult tribal societies and ask how they would like to develop their agricultural profile or the prospects of their lands in terms of agriculture, which would not betray or contradict their traditional style of living, right. Next, what is proposed by Sharma is prioritizing inclusion over more customary, exclusionary, and hierarchical forces. This is something we have already talked about. Next.

**Development and Tribes**

- Prioritizing inclusion over more customary exclusionary forces.
- Cultivating collective self-reliance through cooperation and reduced dependency.
- Shifting away from consumerism and wasteful lifestyles.
- Providing gainful employment and decent livelihoods with adequate nutrition.
- Aiming for comprehensive education, not just basic literacy.



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Cultivating collective self-reliance through cooperation and reduced dependency. Right. So human dignity needs to be propped up. Human dignity has to be there if development is to be brought about in the true sense of the term. So it need not be imposed or trusted upon the tribal people that they are dependent.

They are somewhat less. That is only possible by engendering a sense of self-reliance. If they receive something from mainstream society, they also have something to contribute. They are also prominent citizens. Stakeholders in the scheme.

The next point we have by Sharma is shifting away from the purely consumerist culture and wasteful lifestyles. Very common examples would be, you know, mindless, you know, Groups of youth going to tribal areas because these areas are still very pristine. They are still in their natural shape. We have a lot of greenery in the tribal lands.

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There are youths who visit these places as tourists. They just go for one-night parties or some picnics. They treat these lands as picnic spots and litter them without cleaning. They play loud music. So, they are basically harming nature.

They are destroying the surroundings, and they are completely unapologetic about it. So that lifestyle really clashes with the way tribal people want to keep their environment. Next is providing gainful employment and decent livelihoods with adequate nutrition. Once again, the question of propping up and supporting human dignity among the tribal population. The last point in this context is aiming for comprehensive education, not just basic literacy where a tribal individual can just about read a couple of lines in English, write his name and degree,

and address, and may be able to sign. That's not quite what we understand when we talk about education. Education needs to be more comprehensive, where a person's agential position is developed. A person becomes an agent. He or she has his or her own choices.

**Development and Tribes**

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swagati 10

She or he knows the options. And she or he is in charge as a social member, as a member of a community. That is comprehensive education. So, talking about development and tribes. The narrator of this film, called Vikas Banduk Kenal Se, says, I quote, 'The people of Kashipur, Mundirgaon, Nagarnath, Devas, and Coelkaro are not anti-development.'

**Development and Tribes**

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swagati 10

Unquote. So, There are two different lenses. We are seeing the same picture from two different angles of a prism. For the government, it's an immediate accomplishment that can be incorporated in their book of achievements.

So what has a regime accomplished during the rule of a certain minister? Maybe a dam, maybe a bridge. But the tribals think about subsequent generations. They think about the planet. So they are thinking of planting mangroves to protect the seashore, so there is no erosion, so there is no landslide.

**Development and Tribes**

- The narrator of the film says, "The people of Kashipur, Mundergaon, Nagarnar, Dewas, and Koel-Karo are not anti-development. They have their own dreams and plans for development, which are neither at the cost of the people, nor at the cost of nature. The plans are diametrically opposite to the plans made by the state. While the construction of a big harbour stands for the development in the book of the government, the plantation of mangroves to protect the seashore is conceived by the people as their development."



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They are thinking about... earthquakes, they are thinking about natural disasters and calamities. Here is another excerpt from the movie 'Development Flows from the Barrel of the Gun.' We see how the local people, who are impoverished, do a lot of physical labor. They give their manpower to keep up their sustenance, to basically survive from day to day.

And when that meager means of living is also taken away from them, when they are displaced from their natural habitat, that's when they protest, that's when they raise their voices. So, to conclude, real social development for tribal people requires leveraging their indigenous identity and knowledge, empowering their local initiatives, recognizing their efforts, valuing their suggestions and inputs, ensuring collective participation and inclusion, and prioritizing sustainable agriculture. So, social development in the true sense of the term necessitates genuine inclusion. fostering self-reliance, dignity, and self-respect, and a complete rejection of the model of development driven by mere economic growth and consumerism, which comes at the expense of tribal people's displacement from their natural habitat



and cultural erosion. So, with this, we come to the end of our lecture today. Let us meet with a new topic and another round of discussions in our next lecture. Thank you.