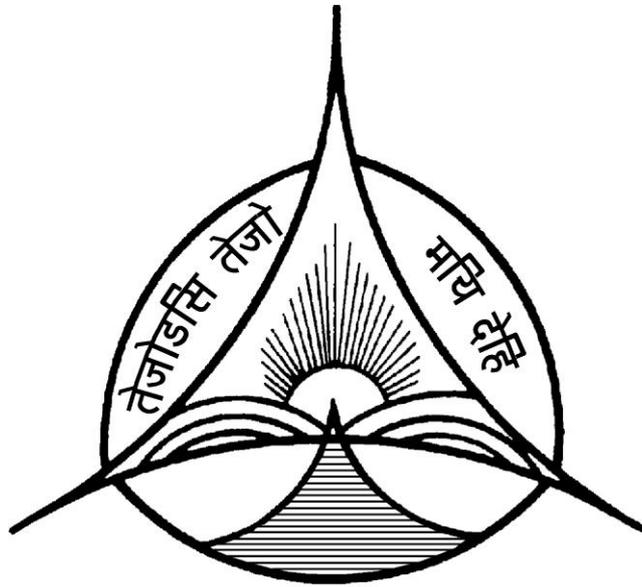


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NEOLIBERALISM, DEVELOPMENT AND TRIBALS

A CONVERSATION WITH DR. FELIX PADEL

Naveen Thomas (Research Scholar, Department of Economics, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi)

Felix Padel is an anthropologist trained in the universities Delhi and Oxford. He is a strong advocate of the rights of tribal and village communities, and has worked extensively with the tribes in Odisha, India. What follows is a conversation with him during his visit to Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Advanced Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. The conversation covers several issues spanning tribal rights, neoliberalism and environmental issues.

NT: Dr. Padel, you have been working with tribal and village communities. Do you see tribal rights in terms of identity politics, human rights, or a different paradigm of historical and ecological negotiations? Do you see this as an alternative to neoliberalism that has taken over our global economics?

FP: Wow that's a big question. In my understanding, more and more, I see tribal societies as the logical opposite of capitalism. I know how complex that word is—tribal societies—and how varied they are. But I think, for example in Marx and Engels's formation, they understood the basic difference between those kinds of societies and capitalism in terms of property; that while modern society values private property hugely as one of their core values, in tribal societies it is above all communal property. It is not that there is no concept of private property, but I think they understood correctly that communal property is the norm. One of the situations that really proved this to me was the Niyamgiri Gram Sabhas, where it wasn't just that the villagers rejected mining— under the Forest Rights Act, the government had prepared private *patta* for all the families and they all unanimously rejected that. They said, we don't want private *patta*, the mountain is ours, we have always lived in common. Even a couple of sociologists who are experts on tribal society have said this quite clearly—that the Forest Rights Act is obviously giving rights that have always been denied to private people. But because it's been the means of application for communal rights (they) have been marginalised in that. It's only a few places where the tribal communities have applied for

communal rights and it is much more difficult to apply. So, in most of the tribal areas, after generations of being oppressed by the forest officials because they don't have patta, what they wanted above all is patta. In a sense this is realising that like in the 1780s when the British started the registration of land, there was a particular term for it. That process ironically might be realised through the Forest Rights Act that on one hand appears to give tribal people the right that they have been denied, and on the other, it is privatising their property. Then the environmentalists: this Act, I believe, has been used to divide environmentalists from the tribal people. If you look at the historical process, when the British started the forest service and passed the Forest Rights Act in the 19th century up until 1928, it was the ultimate divide and rule—they were dividing the tribal people from the forests; tribals who had always conserved the forest. Now you have conservationists who have an eye on India's diminishing forests, and on the history of how financial pressure is brought on communities as prices go up and up. They will at some point sell their land or deforest it because the culture has changed so much. So the kind of black and white view that either the conservationists are right or tribal activists are right is not so simple. To me both of them are right, and both of them are wrong, but in some way the environmentalists are right. They are looking at the bigger picture: these communities have been living in these forests for centuries, but the process of cultural and economic change has affected the tribal people to the extent that their value system has been undermined and they no longer believe in communal property. This is just on this one issue, really. I see it in every one of the tribal movements in India. I use the term tribal, but perhaps indigenous movements is more appropriate as they can be Dalits, tribals, non-tribal farmers, or people who are resisting so-called development projects. They are actually the cutting edge of real development. They provide a real alternative because they are resisting market pressure. When faced with people advising them to sell land to live a better life with vehicles, mobile phones, education, you name it, they say they don't want any of it, that these promises are made time and again and remain unfulfilled. We want no money, they say, we cannot eat money. That's one thing we hear repeatedly. When they say they can't eat money it's like the whole human development index is contradicted because this index makes a very superficial assumption that money can be translated into food. But the people know that it can't because when they are in control of their environment, in control of their own labour, grow their own food, alongside the women, the relationship between genders is very much in balance. When the land is taken

away, they may have more money coming into their accounts than they have ever had before, but that money has become meaningless because they can't buy nutritional food—they can't buy the organic food they have known. I remember a woman in Orissa who had just been displaced saying that they would never grow food again. She really understood that her entire well-being had been undermined in the name of development. That is quite ironic.

NT: With large-scale invasion of forests and mining, such as in the Western ghats presently, how would you look at the politics of people vis-a-vis larger ecological and animal rights?

FP: If you see the issues that have divided the environmentalists and conservationists from social or political activists, it is above all the Forest Rights Act. In many ways both have taken extreme positions, not listening to each other, and the mining companies or the forest department have taken advantage and used it to distance themselves. If you look at the Niyamgiri movement, one of the outstanding things is that the two work together and that is precisely what needs to happen. Let's even say that Marx was incredibly sensitive to ecological issues and the people who call themselves Marxists after him also need to be very sensitive to really understand what is really happening to the ecological system that is the basis of life on earth and needs the urgent attention of economists. For, if you put the economy first, in a certain sense you need to understand that the economy rests on ecosystems, and if the ecosystems are turned into wastelands as the mining companies are doing, then you are destroying the basis of life, not just in society, but also the economy. Therefore, primacy needs to be given to the environment.

Apart from forest rights is the issue of sanctuaries and the core area of the sanctuaries. Conservationists who make an unholy alliance with the forest department believe that the tribal people can simply be pushed out, and the result would be a pristine environment. They don't understand that in fact the pristine environment has coexisted with these communities for generations. Perhaps the rights activists don't understand that by looking at people's rights separate from the rights of the forest or animal rights, they are creating a division, a hierarchy. If you understand the people themselves and tribal myths, despite their hunting animals they see the animals as their relatives. Some native Americans have articulated this very clearly, and what's happening in India amazingly parallels with what's happening in the

USA with the Dakota pipeline. America is a country created on the genocide of the native Americans, who have become spokesmen for the environment, not in a romanticised sense, but from hard experience; when they were destroyed, the buffalo and other animals were destroyed, rivers too. Today one sees the largest protest of native Americans since the genocide stopped in the battle of Wounded Knee in 1819 when the native Americans were thrown into reservations, the children were kidnapped and forced into school to de-tribalise them. They are now supported by a much larger section of the thinking American public. India needs to learn that one is not romanticising tribal culture. But the Left as much as the Right believe that they are at a primitive stage of development and they need to go through the stages of capitalism and industrialisation. The CPM has been particularly vociferous about this. And that is an absurd simplification of Marx and Engels, apart from human history.

I believe strongly that these movements are important, and the needs of these tribal communities and their leaders must be heard with respect, never seeing them as less knowledgeable or educated. When they are the spokesmen for the environment too, like some of the strongest tribal leaders in this country and in America and other places are, we must because, in a sense, they are echoing Marx and Engels. I was recently looking at Engels's first book on the situation of the working class in England, and one of the basic things he said is industrialisation is making the situation of the working class far worse than it was before. I feel this is something that Marxists in India really need to take on board— that this (industrialisation) is not a necessary stage. One of the other things that is significant is that Engels and Marx also look at the factory and find it totally dehumanising and hierarchical, which it is even today. Had they looked at mining in Wales or Scotland or parts of England, they would have found even worse conditions than in the factories, as well as the devastation of the environment which has gotten much worse. To me, the rights of nature and the rights of animals and the rights of humans shouldn't stand against each other, but stand together.

NT: When we are talking about the rights of the tribal cultures, this often conflicts with the pressure on governments to deliver on promises made to the majority of the people, and what is at stake is the rights of the minority. What is the critical link that is separating the minorities and the dominant groups from solving these conflicts?

FP: India has preserved in its society much more diversity than in Europe in the 18th century, for instance. Certain jobs were available only to people of the Protestant church in England and it was much less multicultural. Here there is diversity, but beyond that, if you consider the adivasis and Dalits, what is the difference between them? They are both marginalised communities, but also, to vastly simplify it, Dalits are those who were enslaved or forced down, losing their language, their culture, their traditional economy. The movement of the Dalits now is to regain the basic fundamental right of equality with the rest of society, which is a very valid aim. The tribal movement is completely different because they retreated or many of them were already in the remotest areas of the country, where they were living in symbiosis with nature. I am not romanticising it; in New Zealand, for instance, the word ‘taboo’ comes from a Maori word which means that the area is sacred. What it represents is a restraint from what is taken from nature. So, for example, in Niyamgiri, the Dongria have a taboo on cutting the forest on top of the mountain. That is why the environmentalists are supporting them and that is why the symbiotic relationship is still in operation. But the risk they face are people, Marxist as well as mainstream thinkers, who feel that they (tribals) are sitting on prime land, forests, mineral and water resources that we need for development, so they have to go. But what needs to be understood is that the minerals in the mountains are not inert, the running of the rivers isn't a mechanical movement of water, but living sources of water. When you mine a mountain it's dead, as a storehouse of water it's dead. When you dam a river and use it in a factory, you are stopping the flow of what is feeding and nourishing many villages as well as the whole cycle of water. The Niyamgiri movement and may other such movements in Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, and often Dalit movements like Nandigram and Singur are examples of people with a long-term vision, and that is whom we should be listening to. They want to stay on the land and keep it productive, thereby ensuring the future prosperity of everybody.

NT: What is the role of anthropology in the troubled times of neoliberalism?

FP: Where anthropology has gone wrong is that it became what people call the hand- maiden of colonialism, and to some extent you still see it acting out in the Anthropological Survey of India, where a government department is carrying out anthropological studies almost

precisely in the same way as it was by the colonial power. One of the symbols is physical anthropology with calipers to measure people, sampling for DNA testing, etc., which is very demeaning. The other way is how we write about them, assuming they are a discrete community, and assuming all knowledge about them. It is a hierarchical process that does not allow for engaging with the people themselves, understanding their world and what they can teach us. Instead, we place them in a pit, categorising them as speakers of a language or with a common material culture. That categorisation is itself a form of violence, so the kind of anthropology that I have promoted is what I call reverse anthropology. To begin with, the subject of analysis is the power structure. Who is taking decisions—is it the World Bank and IMF, corporations, even the prime minister or chief minister exerting power? You cannot analyse them as a discrete village, like an ASI monograph would—this is the economy, this is the social structure, the kinship system, religious beliefs, their customs, and so on. You can no longer understand the society in isolation without understanding the role of the forest official, the police, the Naxalites or Maoists, school teachers, traders and money lenders. An ASI monograph does not have this ability, so their's is a false construct. So yes, anthropology has a huge role to play. One of the best gifts of anthropology is the very long term and subtle relationship that develops with the people through informants who make the people's voice and their understanding the centre. And then you ultimately support people to write their own books and own version. Who am I to say who tribal people are? It is for them to say. But they have been so divided, partly by the education system which teaches them who are educated and who are uneducated, who are left wing who are not. You will not get one voice from them, obviously. But they should be empowered to give their version of who they really are, and that is what anthropology should be doing.

NT: Can you tell us a little bit about your activist work in India?

FP: Maybe it started in the same way through reverse anthropology, really, In the book, *Sacrificing People*, I made the object of study the power structure started by the British, and the last chapter of that first edition was in the name of development. So it's looking at how that power structure has continued post-independence—when you see the police force, for example, or the concept of development, it is a very old concept with nothing new. It's actually archaic, and in the name of this concept of development, people are being displaced

by big dam projects, supposedly in the interests of wider society. They become exported industrial workers. This is an activist perspective that is seeking real change in the power structure with the aim of empowering people in terms of enabling their relationship with each other and with nature, and to give them a level playing field. If Tata Steel wants to develop a factory on people's land, where is the level playing field where they can talk to each other as equals? It's a very unequal relationship. In a way my activism has come out of that. When I was writing my first book about the British invasion of remote parts of India, somebody came to me and said, okay you've done the invasion by the British, but can you help me analyse the invasion of the aluminium companies, the mining companies? That led to a reverse anthropology of the whole aluminium industry. So my activism has proceeded like that. I think there is a huge role for a free-thinking intellectual to offer fresh perspectives which can then inspire people to understand and work with movements. My involvement with movements has been mainly in this way.

NT: A related question, is it possible for an activist to take a broader view and act as a mediator?

FP: I know of a few examples of activists playing the role of mediator between big corporations and indigenous communities. In Canada or the United States, for instance, there have been a few such cases. But I think on the whole there are rival ideologies at work here; one is an ideology where economic growth and profit of the winning entities is a priority, which is in a way the model of corporations, and the other is the long term well-being of everybody, a socialist perspective, if you like. It includes a long term environmental perspective. If you understand what's happening to the environment through climate change, global warming, over-industrialisation, etc., then you have to take a stand and say, enough, this is not contributing to overall well-being and it is actually destroying ecosystems. If you adopt that perspective, then you can still be neutral. You are not saying those in corporations are necessarily bad people, but you are saying that we have to find a way to restrain this. It is not just greed, but a mechanical drive that is in the broader context leading to total self-destruction. Economist Adam Smith was one of the biggest critics of the East India Company in particular, and corporations in general. But he believed that if the regulations that have been imposed on corporations are ever removed, the world would see a more dangerous form

of tyranny than ever before. And since Thatcher and Regan, we are living in a world governed by deregulation, which removes the restraints on corporate greed or the remorseless drive for private profit. It is interesting that despite his critique of companies, the Adam Smith Institute's website, which is a very right wing British think tank, it doesn't mention this.

NT: So you have decided to make India your base. What makes you relate to this country where neoliberalism is taking deeper root?

FP: The sad fact is that neoliberalism is taking deeper root everywhere. The same battles are being fought in Britain against privatisation of education and of health. Environmental battles too, even though the stakes now may not seem as high as they are in India as large scale displacement of communities, for instance, took place much earlier during Britain's industrialisation. But there are issues on which people feel very passionate and for which they campaign strongly, but sometimes there is quite ruthless suppression of these movement, as you are seeing now in the United States with the Dakota pipeline. I still believe in the massive potential in India because there is a lot of free thinking here. It is a very political country in the sense that there is a very wide spectrum of political views and debates. And there is also something about ancient India that is still alive here, for example yoga and meditation, which offer a way to go deeper than the West which did not have these traditions. Even ancient Greece did not have anything quite like meditation and yoga. It would be good if India can be true to that and not see these traditions as right or wrong, or pertaining to one religion and not another, but rather as a resource that everybody can draw on. In the case of development projects, for instance, there is no attempt to look at self-development, how is the human being developing, because if you do, then you understand how society develops. I suppose what I am saying in another way is that if you go to a village, you will find a great deal of wisdom, even if the people are not literate. There is still a huge diversity here and I suppose I do identify with a lot of the movements here than I do with movements in the west. Not I don't identify with them at all, but as I said, the stakes here are much higher. So yes, I do love this country. Terrible things are happening here, but actually terrible things are happening everywhere. Neoliberalism is a kind of monster of self-interest that is spreading everywhere.

NT: Given the nature of urban development in capitalist economies, how do you work towards a holistic vision of environment and development, which is basically your area of work?

FP: I think that's what I have been saying before if you look at some of the peoples' movements which are a real inspiration and at the cutting edge of real development and forward thinking. Even the *Artha Shastra*, written more than 2,200 years ago, was looking at how to make profit in terms of resources. In the case of mining, for example, it advises us to never allow private interests to take care of minerals. Very very clear and deep insight there, which in a way fit in with the vision at independence that public sector companies should be in charge of basic minerals. It's not that public sector companies are actually any better now because the market forces are steering all of them. That was 2,000 years ago, what about the next 2,000 years? If India has so much coal, iron ore and other mineral deposits, so many rivers that are coming from the mountains, how do you plan for the next 2,000 years? If that is development, these movements need wider support and recognition. They are not just defending their own little territories, but are actually protecting resources for the future. That's why the native Americans call themselves not just protestors but protectors. I think the same leap in understanding should be made in India about movements for Niyamgiri, for Balaghat mines in Chhattisgarh, for Saranda forests in Jharkhand, Khandadhar in north Orissa, and many others. They are movements that are protecting the whole future. They are protecting the ecosystems that are protecting the whole.

The urban way of life. I have recently been part of several meetings about sustainable cities, what they are and how to make cities sustainable. In essence, cities are unsustainable. One expert, in consultation with the chief minister, has drawn up a beautiful plan for Amaravati, the new capital city of Andhra Pradesh. The plan is for a city that is sustainable in terms of large stretches of grassland, preservation of the floodplains, food that is organically grown, etc. This is a vision of sustainable cities. But as is the model of cities right now, they are just parasites eating all the wealth from everywhere. Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, when he was Chief Minister of West Bengal, articulated more than any other Chief Minister, that the farmers' way of life was uneconomic and they needed to transform into industrial labourers.

The same was said by Chidambaram, and the same by the present BJP-led government. That vision needs to be reversed. We must respect the people on the land, growing their own food and maintaining the ecosystems that are sustaining all of us. But those ecosystems are not so visible in cities. We might have the Aravali Biodiversity Park which is of great value in making cities a lot more sustainable, but the nature in the wild, the rivers, the mountains that are sources of life on earth and life in India—it is these that need to be respected.

NT: In one sense the idea of cities where people live in close quarters and benefit from the markets that emanate are incompatible with the idea of sustainability. So does this mean that we have to prevent the concentration of people in an area, as it happens in urbanisation?

FP: I don't necessarily think so. Cities have existed since ancient times, and if you look at cities in what is now Iraq and Syria, civilisation began there even before Harappa. Then massive deforestation took place. So urbanisation does often lead to destruction of the outlying space, but with a more conscious model it doesn't have to and I don't believe it always has. If you could analyse estimated population statistics today—which is very difficult because migration is escalating at a rapid pace—more and more people are coming to the cities, some very poor, and it is obvious that life is unsustainable here. If you look at industrialising Britain, for example, worked with the idea of sustainability, building fairly good quality housing for the workers inside the cities. What's happening now with slum redevelopment is that workers are being pushed right to the margins where water and transport are huge problems, and they are not paid enough either.

NT: Anthropology as a discipline has close contacts with progress, development and evolution as shown by James Ferguson. Do you think that anthropologists can criticise the very idea of development and development programmes without critiquing their own discipline?

FP: I do think they have to question the notion of development because of the way it is being used. If you look at, for example, the human development index (HDI), it does try to put human well-being at the centre. I would have huge problems with how you can measure it and think that the HDI is actually giving a balanced view of whether well-being is getting

worse or better. The problem is when you put industrial development or economic growth first, then we are seeing that human well-being is not getting better. And because anthropology has a particular relationship with tribal societies, look what has happened to tribal societies in India in the name of development. Well-being has just done a nose dive because of hundreds of so-called development projects. This just shows that the concept of development is completely out of order, and does not put human well-being first. And I think the other more fundamental criticism that I would make is, like I said at the beginning, is that our development is a very old development, and the model is archaic. People often say that all strata are changing, and of course it's true; but at the same time, some strata place more value on what you could call continuity or sustainability. And I would say that the tribal value system is one such. A Dongria woman said, 'we need the mountain as the mountain needs us', or Lado Sikaka, the Dongria leader, who said, 'people are saying that there is money at the top of Niyamgiri in the form of the money that can be bought from selling the Bauxite, that isn't money up there, that is our *Maa-Baap* and we have to protect her'. So they are bringing in a completely different value system. So when we talk about change as the rate of change, say when an industry comes to an area, it's at all levels. I think it is a philosophical problem or it could be a problem of understanding of what human society is, how does human society change or develop. In a way, Marxists have accepted uncritically the idea of stages of social evolution. Darwin was showing how thousands of species are evolving or developing in different directions. It's not as if all of them are trying to become like human beings, but when that idea is applied to society, it's as if all societies develop through primitive communalism, slave earning, feudalism and then capitalism, as if that is fixed. It's just not that simple, and so look at what is happening in the name of development, the massive de-development of the ecosystem that is being turned into wastelands. Or tribal societies which are in fact highly developed societies but in a different direction from the mainstream with a different value structure. Whatever else might have been wrong with Nehru, when he talked about each society needing to develop according to its own genius, he understood that development is an indigenous process. Development can't be imposed, so when people use language like 'they are not developed', 'they need to be developed', it is actually a misuse of language. That is, you are talking about something that is done to people instead of something they are in charge of. So much has de-developed in the name of development.

NT: Being from the lineage of Charles Darwin, what do you think are the influences that he has had on you?

FP: Partly what I have been talking about, and partly the love of and interest in nature. My last book was '*Ecology Economy: Quest for Socially Informed Connection*'; the word Ecology came from a German called Ernst Haeckel who met Darwin and formed the concept he called Darwin's economics of nature. So, in a way, Darwin, whatever his theory of evolution might have been, was through a very holistic understanding of nature and of the place of human beings in nature. If you read *The Origin of Species*, it is a very ecological view of society; it looks at how so many species are evolving in relation to each other, and then how human beings are also evolving or interfering with or having an impact on nature. So that is one of the fundamental things that he has given me, to really take an ecological view. Another thing is to understand man's place in nature. This he has done anatomically, by dissecting thousands of animals and birds and fish to show that there are similarities between the embryo of a rabbit and a human. So humans are part of nature and not above or separate from nature. And maybe that's why his idea was taken as heresy by a lot of fundamentalist Christians, but for a broad-minded person there is no contradiction in the idea that Darwin was not giving an atheist view of the world—he was giving an agnostic view of the world. There may well be a spirit in nature, or God might exist, and of course God is part of these principles of nature. How can he be separate, how can God not be nature. For me it was very inspiring that he has given me a view of life where nature is itself central. It also fits the idea of human beings being related to nature. It also fits the tribal myths of where we come from—is an egg or the trees or the tiger our relatives? What he did not do is paint the idea of the survival of the fittest as a justification for capitalism. He did use that phrase, but it wasn't his phrase, it came from Herbert Spencer, and the way it's been used I think it contradicts the essence of what he is saying which is a much gentler view—that there is cooperation between species and he shows that through several examples. Everything is not red and tooth and claw and competing all the time. So you can't really find a justification for extreme capitalism.

NT: We have seen that Hindutva cultural nationalism and neoliberalism can somewhat feed into each other. What are your views on this?

FP: I see this as a very dangerous marriage, I see a lot in Hinduism and all other religions that are of great value, like meditation and yoga, as I have mentioned. Unfortunately, when you turn religion into a national identity or a fundamentalist perspective, you really distort it. And in some ways Hindutva organisations have been copying some of the missionary organisations and becoming much more extreme than they were. I see this with tribal education. At independence the idea was that tribal education and tribal policy in general should be one of integration with the mainstream. But that can only be on a level playing field where the mainstream learns from them and they learn from the mainstream. But if you see what's really happened, it's a policy of assimilation which means forcing them into the mainstream. In doing that, you're trying to erase all differences. This is very sad. The missionaries might have started boarding schools for tribal children, removing them from their villages, but it has gone much further than that. Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences in Bhubaneswar claims to be the world's biggest school for tribal children, 25,000 students, and it is funded by mining companies. Vedanta and Nalco signed an MOU with Adani so we are talking huge sums. So what is the education they're getting? They are far removed from their society. They come from 62 tribes of Orissa, and one hears that there is a lot of pressure on families to send their children there. One also hears of suicides in the school, which is not surprising when you understand the degree of alienation. One suspects that there is a strong Hindutva nationalism that is being inculcated and certainly an industrial ideology at the same time. If the BJP is for an India for Indians, preserving what is best in Indian culture is all very well, but instead they are making unholy deals with foreign capital, exploiting the country more than ever before. This is a contradiction that I think a lot of people within the RSS who support farmers, or within the BJP, are aware of. But it is a real fault-line in the ruling coalition in the form of extreme nationalism. This industrialisation ideology is very similar to what was there in Japan or Hitler's Germany. It is a kind of ideology that goes towards war and death rather than towards integration and really appreciating the old values of these communities. Maybe, India like Britain, the real India you find in the villages maybe more than in the cities if you can generalise, the culture is linked with the system of cultivation that is very old and particular crops that farmers have kept the seeds and they understand how the

seeds work. So when a company like Monsanto is allowed entry, it is destroying the essence of Indian culture. In a sense it seems as corporate-funded, cultural cleansing, in one sense.

FP: I think a lot of this has happened through non-resident Indians (NRIs). Indians who live abroad are nostalgic for their country; they want to make their country great, and they think that investing in new projects will achieve that. For them, Indian culture is the latest kind of sari or Indian food. They can be proud of it sure, or even classical music, which I myself I love, but it is not a culture that is linked to the land, to agriculture, and to the culture of nature as it once was. The word culture, coming from the Latin word *Cultus*, also gives us cult and cultivation. So to me that is Indian culture, a system of cultivation. People like Debal Deb and some others really understand the old systems, how rice originated, where it originated in India, what cultures have kept that going. They are doing incredibly important work for the future of this country. And there needs to be much more focus on this holistic vision.

NT: We have multinational organisations like World Bank and IMF, which are the flag bearers of capitalism and neoliberalism. Their activities in developing countries like India are targeted towards that. However, in recent times we have seen a shift in the way they go about their activities. Now they have introduced environmental and social impact evaluation to divert attention away from core capitalistic views. How do you see that fitting into the broader perspective of their roles in countries like India?

FP: I think they have always funded the antidote of what they are doing to make it appear like very holistic development. They put a lot of pressure, 10 to 15 years ago, to make a new resettlement policy, but when we look at how that resettlement policy really works, the policy is one thing and the implementation is completely different. It's like that with social assessment as well. If you look at the pressure that was put in the 1990s to make environmental impact assessment (EIA) mandatory through a public hearing process, the number of authentic accounts that one has read about the process was being manipulated with huge police presence. The EIAs were so badly written and actually cut and pasted from other projects. An example was of data on flora and fauna from a Russian project being cut and pasted into an EIA for a project in Maharashtra. This shows a lack of respect for a proper analysis of what the impacts are going to be. To understand the environmental impacts of a

dam project, for instance, the analysis must be neutral and weighed in terms of what works for and against the project. In practice, if an impact study is too critical of the project, those who do it don't get paid, and so on. With public hearings it even goes to the extent that occasionally when a collector has given a correct assessment of the people's views, stating clearly that they are not just showing contempt but have strong views that should be heard, the collector is transferred. He has to give a report that states that the public hearing has resulted in consent. As if expression of their views means consent rather than consultation. I've heard of this in Andhra Pradesh, for example, with one of the bauxite mining projects. It is the same with social impact assessment. The first social impact of any big project is to divide the people, and this is done systematically wherein the bigger landowners make a deal with them, and the smaller ones without the patta are against it. But the social impact assessment doesn't start there, it just does it in a much more mechanical way, maybe using the human development index and very abstract formulations. So there is no analysis of what is happening, no analysis of the divisions created, the promises given, like every family will get jobs, etc. In the case of NALCO, which is often claimed to be one of the best projects in Koratpur district in Orissa, I remember people saying that in the beginning this was true, now it is just the pretence. Everybody knows that the policy is never going to be implemented because there is no one to look at it impartially and see if promises are being kept or not. If they haven't been kept, should the company be closed down? They have absolutely failed to fulfil their promise, so what is the penalty? There isn't any. I've written articles on social impact assessment, and it's a good idea, but the problem is, how to give it teeth. Nobody has really found a way to do that.