



I Session from 9.30 am to 11 am

Chair **Peggy Mohan**, Social Linguist, New Delhi
Speakers **Ganesh Devy**
Founder & Trustee, Adivasi Academy, Tejgadh, India

The Language of Development:
A Report on the Rathwa Bhail View of Development
Language Disadvantage and Capability Deprivation of
Tribal Mother Tongue Speakers

Discussants **Ajit K. Mohanty**
Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
Shobha Satyanath
Reader, Dept. of Linguistics, University of Delhi, Delhi
Hemant Joshi
Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi

II Session from 11.30 am to 1 pm

Chair **Savyasaachi Bhattacharya**
Former Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Speakers **Frederique Marglin**
Professor, Department of Anthropology,
Smith College, Northampton, USA

The Potential of Fair Trade for Bio-Cultural
Regeneration of Marginalized Groups in the South:
The Case of the Oro Verde Coffee Cooperative in Peru
Culture Matters in the Knowledge Economy

Discussants **Linda Smith**, Professor, The National Institute for
Research Excellence in Maori Development and Advancement,
University of Auckland, New Zealand
Pravin Sinha, Senior Advisor, Labour, FES, New Delhi
Prathama Banerjee
Lecturer, Miranda House, University of Delhi, Delhi

III Session from 2 to 4 pm

Chair **K. K. Chakravarty**, Member Secretary, IGNSA, New Delhi

Speakers **Amita Baviskar**
Rustom Bharucha
Smitu Kothari
Concluding Reflections
- do -
- do -

Rethinking Development from the Margins

Arvind Kumar Mishra*

A recent conference on the perspective of development was an attempt to examine the issue of culture, modernity, politics of knowledge, social change, identity and dignity from the vantage point of marginalised communities. Notwithstanding acknowledging the role of culture in the development of society, communities lagging in development are often blamed for their sorry state of affairs by being represented as powerless, voiceless and lacking in agency in the dominant development discourse. A major understanding that emerged from diverse discussion is that these communities do have cultural resources that not only facilitate their development but also problematise the notion of development itself.

A three-day international conference Culture Matters: Understanding Development from the Perspectives of Marginal Communities was held in New Delhi from October 13-15, 2006. The conference sought to capitalise upon a growing interest in issues

* Co-ordinator of the Conference.



such as how does culture matter to marginal communities and how culture enables the process of self-empowerment among marginal communities.

The conference had a fair representation of academicians, public intellectuals, writers, bureaucrats and social activists from India, UK, Belgium, Germany, and the United States. The conference was organised by Deshkal Society, a Delhi-based civil society organisation, with its supporting partner the Indian Council For Cultural Relations

(ICCR), New Delhi; The Prince Claus Fund, Hoge; Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI), Patna; Indira Gandhi National Centre For the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi; Sulabh International Social Service Organisation, New Delhi; Sanskriti Foundation, New Delhi and Bhasha Research Centre, Baroda.

Context of the Conference

Deshkal's journey to understand development from perspectives of margins began with research and documentation on the Musahars who are often referred to as 'Dalits among Dalits' and occupy the bottom rung of society in the middle Gangetic plains of Bihar. Descendants of a Chotanagpur tribe, the Musahars are scattered all over the paddy-growing areas, providing the so-called unskilled labour. The overpowering presence of the dominant image of the Musahar community posed daunting challenges in the initial stage to understand what is indeed development from the Musahar point of view.

The benefits of various development schemes launched by the government and the international agencies did not reach the Musahar community while the other Dalit community was able to take advantage of this scheme for improving their conditions. On enquiry, the professionals involved in the development of this community argued that Musahars are deficient in all the necessary characteristics required for



development whereas our interaction with the community gave a different impression about them having a thriving community structure, community-specific epics, political agency, creative modes of expression and, above all, the irrepressible desire to lead a dignified and meaningful life.

The contrasting images of this 'underdeveloped' community raised many questions related to the meanings and goals of development. The review of related literature made it clear that people working with marginalised communities in various parts of the world had gone through somewhat similar experiences. With this backdrop, Deshkal conceived the idea of organising this conference with this objective in mind

To capitalise upon a growing interest in issues such as how does culture matter to marginal communities and how culture enables the process of self-empowerment among marginalised communities.

The conference set forth with the explorations into the answers to certain key questions that emerged during research and documentation on culture and development in the context of the Musahar community in Bihar :

- Why do marginal communities always appear only as oppressed and poor in mainstream development practices? Is it the lack of innovative indicators only, or the lack of a perspective? But from whose perspective do we understand whom?

- What makes marginal communities survive in adverse and hostile conditions?
- How do multiple voices of marginal communities enrich the notion of development?

Development and Construction of 'Others'

Imperialist American identities have constructed external others-ranging from the 1950 paranoia about 'communists' to the contemporary otherisation of Islam. However, the symbolic purification of the American mainstream also constructed internal others racial, ethnic or gender groups constructed to represent feared and polluting margins. The symbolic schizmogeneration of "America" / its others have been studied during the last several decades. the political opposition of Centre/Margin has been repeatedly entertained with moral oppositions of Good /Bad which are naturalised with falsely biologised opposition of White/Black, Male/Female, Culture/Nature and Mind/Body. One of the papers considered the opposition of "America" to the national icon of "hillbilly" people who are symbolically coded as white (although many are not) and identified with rural wildlands, especially the mountainous subregions of Appalachia and the Ozarks- which are portrayed as underdeveloped strangers to American affluence and the American culture of progress.



The America/hillbilly dynamic is important to study because it delinks many of 'America's' constitutive dualisms from each other. The qualities it codes as central are similar to the qualities which are put in opposition to other margins. But, in many ways, it invests the whiteness and maleness which are usually associated with the centre's authority. Participants discussed the ways in which the power of racist, imperialist and sexist authority comes from the ability to suffuse its meanings within images of superiority without drawing attention to its own material and embodied nature. However, the "hillbilly" icon the otherisd whiteness-- disrupts this image which is visibly marked with strongly embodied qualities of male violence, natural wildness and uncontrollable sexuality.

Alternative Vision of 'Development'

A paper on the "Potential of Fair Trade for Bio-Cultural Regeneration of Marginalised Groups" discussed the alternative vision of development. Fair trade is understood as a particular type of relationship between 'ethical consumers' and low-income producer households through international trade. The following widely accepted definition of its makes this clear :

"Fair trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development

by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalised producers and workers, especially in the South. Fair Trade organisations (backed by consumers) are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade. Fransisco (Franz) Van derhoff Bocrsma, a Dutch Catholic worker priest, the co-founder of the Fair Trade movement makes the following remark about 'development':

"Development and underdevelopment came out of a factory producing glamorous fantasies ...In fact, for the excluded social majorities, development signifies undertaking a path that others know better, towards a goal that others have already reached (...) in a one-way street--- The so-called "poor"... propose the restoration of what development denied them: the opportunity of creating their own ways of life, of establishing and regulating their own communal spheres, of living with dignity ... The opposite of development is not underdevelopment...[but rather] hospitality... The creation of the Alternative Market, of Fair Trade, is the result of this hospitality. The other who needs my product is part of my family."



It was also mentioned during the discussion that Fair Trade will be able to divest itself of the deleterious and debilitating constraints entailed by its development discourse and become fair and dialogical in economic terms but also in bio- cultural terms.

Culture: Strength of the Marginalised People

Although marginalised people are poor and oppressed, they have cultural resources in plenty to fight their oppression and poverty. Despite internalising the hegemonic perspective of the dominant section of the society, the marginalised people remain in an openended dialogue with the former. Our understanding of the 'Musahar community's culture' is that the cultural practices have been responsible for enabling them to aspire to lead a 'good,' 'meaningful' and 'dignified' life. Cultural practices are living heritage that helps this community to maintain values, traditions, identity, to develop self-esteem and to survive in adverse social and economic conditions. For many Maori people, culture has been the source of an alternative world view that has sustained a critique of colonisation even as people have ultimately had to integrate into New Zealand society. In a way, culture liberates the minds of people who are physically, politically, economically and socially not free.

Negotiating Exclusion

The traditional livelihood practices involving craft or rearing animals or indigenous practices of commerce and trade have always been under the constant threat of marginalisation. In non-Western societies the traditional practices were socially excluded under rules of purity and pollution practised by dominant communities. Similarly, at another level, the rapidly transforming global economic shift from manufacturing to services, from resource-based to knowledge-based production, and from place-based to mobile capital accumulation has posed a major threat. Knowledge of traditional practices of livelihood and commerce are regarded as "economically unfit" to negotiate the global economic forces. The case of the Khatiks of Kanpur in India demonstrates how a marginalised community has successfully transformed the culturally and religiously abominable marker "pig" into a secularised trade and consumption.

Understanding Capabilities

Over a period of time there have been persistent efforts towards developing a common approach towards understanding the capabilities of marginal communities



within the larger disciplinary space of the social sciences. In this context, the Capability Approach has emerged as an offshoot of such thinking for developing a common framework.

The question that emerged during the discussion is that is the capability approach not simply doing what the non-economic social sciences, especially sociology, have been doing for many years? Do grassroots organisations have to spend all the scarce energy in understanding the capability approach if it might be similar to other already much older frameworks and philosophies?

It is a fact that scholars using advanced quantitative techniques and scholars using ethnographic methods in general tend not to communicate. By having a common theoretical framework that allows for a range of applications, including standard quantitative ones, the Capability Approach opens up a truly interdisciplinary space in the study of well-being, inequality, justice and public policies.

The discussants observed that looking at the crucial issues of marginal communities like poverty which denies easy summation to put solely into 'economic' and 'cultural' categories, the Capability Approach offers an opportunity to unearth the various dimensions under a common framework.

Notwithstanding its limitations, the Capability Approach was understood as one of several important tools useful for marginalised groups and as a discourse that appeals to many of the persons and groups who are working to improve the lives of the worst-off, and who fight against injustices. It has the potentiality to be a useful discourse since it does not have materialistic biases, nor does it put the weight of development problems either uniquely at the level of the economic system, nor the cultural system.

Where Does it Lead Us To?

Reflecting on discussions on various issues related to culture and development in the context of marginalised communities, it was commonly understood that marginal communities have been able to acquire critical awareness of their oppression through the praxis of their struggle. Their present assessment of oppressed reality bears a liberative orientation. In fact their self-assessment has been largely a culturally mediated process whereby they are not only combating subjective immobility within themselves but are also constructively engaged in building bridges within communities to rise above narrow sectarian selves, ripping open the curse of insular existence. Such actions of marginal communities reflect their visions for meaningful coexistence in a multiple and plural society.



Towards an Agenda of Future

This three days conference has come up with an abundance of information, experiences, view points and analyses accumulated, much of it on the front line of research, reflection and libertive works in conceptualizing development from the margins. When formulating any sustained future plan, Deshkal Society is quite conscious of the difficulties but equally conscious of the paramount need to outline a vision.

The proceedings of this conference do need to be disseminated to a wider audience.

Towards this we would be published the proceedings of the conference as a book.

Apart from this we propose the following possible future efforts as a follow up of this conference.

1. In our ongoing journey of consolidating and creating public spaces for a dialogue on culture and development with a focus on marginal communities we seek to organize a series of regional conferences that are a synergistic combination of workshop as well as performances. These conferences would seek to foster a dialogue among established academia, organic intelligentsia as well members of community

2. Exploratory research based on participatory research methodologies on selected communities in regions
3. An online space on the Internet dedicated to sharing experiences on issues of culture and development of marginal communities
4. A six Monthly Magazine that places the reach out the dispersed experience as well bodies of Knowledge related to culture and development with a focus on marginal communities in the public space
5. An International Conference every two years and the proceedings to be published as a book.



Inaugural Session from 9.30 am to 11 am

Chair **Imtiaz Ahmad**, Chairperson, Deshkal Society
 Welcome **O.P. Jain**, President, Sanskriti Foundation
 Context of the seminar **Arvind Mishra** **Representation, resistance and identity: Understanding culture of Musahar community in Bihar (Arvind Mishra, Badri Narayan, Rafiul Ahmed and Sanjay Kumar)**
 Coordinator of the conference
 Inaugural Remarks **Ashis Nandy**, Social Theorist, CSDS, Delhi
 Guest of Honour **B.P. Singh**, Former Culture Secretary, Govt. of India
 Slide show on the livelihood, culture and identity of the Musahar community namely Asharhi Puja (a ritual), paddy cultivation and settlement

II Session from 11.30 am to 1 pm

Chair **Frederique Marglin**, Professor, Department of Anthropology, Smith College, Northampton, USA
 Speakers **Betsy Taylor**, Visiting Scholar, Department of Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University, USA **Pollution, Subsistence, Sustainability in USA Nationalism: The Symbolic Construction of 'Appalachia' as America's 'trash' People**
Herbert Reid, Professor, University of Kentucky, USA **Comparative Perspective on Critical Regionalism, Social Ecology, and Post-Development Theory: The Case of Appalachian USA Marginalization**
 Discussants **B. S. Butola**, Professor, CSRD, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
Thierry Verhelst, Editor, Culture and Development, Brussels, Belgium

III Session from 2 to 3.30 pm

Chair **Girishwar Misra**, Professor, Psychology, University of Delhi, Delhi
 Speakers **Lyla Mehta**, Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK **Reimagining Development: Perspectives from Displaced and Dispossed People**
Meena Radhakrishna, Reader, Dept. of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, Delhi **Urban Denotified Tribes: Contested Citizenship, Conflicting Identities**
 Discussants **Amita Baviskar**, Associate Professor, Institute of Economic Growth, University of Delhi, Delhi
Badri Narayan, Fellow, G.B. Pant Institute, Allahabad

IV Session from 4 to 5.30 pm

Chair **Harish Khare**, Associate Editor, The Hindu, New Delhi
 Speakers **Alpa Shah**, Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, Goldsmith College, University of London, London, UK **Corruption, Morality and the State: Insights from Jharkhand, India**
Saji M., Research Scholar, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi **Trajectories of Livelihood of the Marginalised: Understanding the Negotiation Process of the Forest Dependent Communities in Kerala**
 Discussants **Smitu Kothari**, Director, Intercultural Resources, New Delhi
Rohan D'Souza, Asst. Professor, Centre For Studies in Science Policy, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

I Session from 9.30 am to 11 am

Chair **Shaibal Gupta**, Member Secretary, Asian Development Research Institute, Patna
 Speakers **Ashwani Kumar** **Rethinking Social Capital, Caste Violence and Dalit Politics in India**
 Associate Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai
Ingrid Robeyns, Post-doctoral researcher on Amartya Sen's capability approach and issues of social and distributive justice in welfare states, The Netherlands **How can the Capability Approach be used to Serve Marginal Communities?**
 Discussants **Gail Omvedt**, Senior Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum Library, New Delhi
Sumangala Damodaran, Senior Lecturer, Dept. of Economics, Lady Shriram College, University of Delhi, Delhi

II Session from 11.30 am to 1 pm

Chair **D. K. Bhattacharya**, Former Professor, University of Delhi
 Speakers **Rahul Ghai**, Marfat and Freelance Consultant **Making of a liberative discourse around a cultural resource from the margins: the story of reinvigoration of the tradition of sufiyana kalam of Mirs of Pugal**
Arjan de Haan, Visiting Professor, Collaborative International Development Studies, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Guelph, Canada **Historically Marginalised Groups and Social Policy: Indian Affirmative Action in an International Perspective**
 Discussants **Rustom Bharucha**, Independent writer, director, and cultural critic, Calcutta
Betsy Taylor, Visiting Scholar, Department of Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University, USA

III Session from 2 to 3.30 pm

Chair **T. K. Oommen**, Former Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
 Speakers **Gail Omvedt** **Radical Bhakti Movement and its Cultural Perspective on Development**
 Senior Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum Library, New Delhi
Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp, Senior Research Fellow, South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, Stuttgart, Germany **Livelihoods and Cultural Codes-Pork and Pigs in Indian Culture**
 Discussants **Shashi Bhushan Upadhayaya**, Professor, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi
Ganesh Devy, Founder & Trustee, Adivasi Academy, Tejgadh, India

IV Session from 4 to 5.30 pm

Chair **D. L. Sheth**, Senior Fellow, CSDS, New Delhi
 Speakers **Vinay Lal**, Associate Professor, Department of History, University of California, At Los Angeles, USA **Culture, Dissent and the Spaces of Hope**
Thierry Verhelst, Editor, Culture and Development Brussels, Belgium **The Culture of Development or the Development of Culture? A Matter of Dignity and Freedom**
 Discussants **Shail Mayaram**, Senior Fellow, CSDS, New Delhi
Linda Smith, Professor, The National Institute for Research Excellence in Maori Development and Advancement, University of Auckland, New Zealand

Deshkal Society

329, SFS Flats, Mukherjee Nagar
Delhi-110009
Ph. +91-11-27654895
Fax. +91-11-27655336
e-mail: desh13@rediffmail.com
URL: www.deshkalindia.com



Rethinking **DEVELOPMENT** *from the Margins*

*Report of the International Conference
on 13 to 15 October, 2006*

Publication: Year 2007

Published by
Deshkal Society

329, SFS Flats, Mukherjee Nagar
Delhi-110009
Ph.+91-11-27654895
e-mail: desh13@rediffmail.com
URL: www.deshkalindia.com



Supported by
The Prince Claus Fund

Hoge Nieuwstraat 30
2514 EL Den Haag
Nederland

Printed by
Systems Vision
A-199, Okhla Phase I
New Delhi-110020

About Deshkal

■ Deshkal Society is involved in understanding, documenting and disseminating key issues of social, cultural and economic aspects of the society. We take up themes for research, documentation and advocacy that have often been subjected to neglect at large. Deshkal also tries to enhance the capacity of marginalised communities by ensuring their partnership in knowledge-based activism. In addition, it has been our primary concern to place these activities in the mainstream discourse. To meet these ends, we have devised our strategy such that we can influence emerging of the ground-level issues being considered by policy-makers, bureaucrats, developmental agencies and media personality at the national and international fora. This process has been a two-way dialogue between global and local voices in which both can raise queries and issues on an equal footing. We thus try to ensure that we prepare a long-term planning to bring about a substantial change among them.