

We, the people of India

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Abstract: *The word ‘development’ has increasingly become an oft-used, clichéd political slogan, particularly before an election in the country. But, on pondering deeper, the question that arises in mind is, ‘whose development’ are we talking about? Drawing from our basic readings in political literature, we would like to believe, it is the ‘development’ of the common people of our country, irrespective of their class, caste, gender or race, because the Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic, Republic that India has committed itself to be can make one feel that the common people are the supreme rulers in this land and that all policy decisions will be taken keeping in mind their good governance. But, has it so happened? This paper aims to particularly focus on the issue of displacement-induced development of the country in last six years, with the tribal population bearing the brunt of such flawed policies.*

Keywords: Statue of Unity, Hasdeo Arand, Aarey, Godda Project, Land Act 2013.

Introduction

The art of conducting politics in modern democracies has often been characterized by a tendency to repress, limit and impede the spontaneous forces and functions of life. Basic readings on Foucault’s concept of ‘Biopolitics’ or ‘Biopower’, as may be found in his seminal works, ‘*The Will To Knowledge*’, ‘*Society Must Be Defended*’ and ‘*The Birth of Biopolitics*’ often used interchangeably and synonymously, critiques the modern democracies for reducing citizens to objects on which precise control and comprehensive regulations can be imposed and therefore, regulating their lives in the guise of development and welfare. Is it true? Let us begin by placing this article against the backdrop of such a theoretical foundation.

What do the laws on Scheduled Tribes say?

The Scheduled Tribes, having been recognized as the most marginalized, isolated and deprived population in the country, have been granted some legal and constitutional protection. ‘The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, in section 4(5) states that save as otherwise provided, no member of a forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes or Other Traditional Forest Dweller shall be evicted or removed from the Forest Land until his occupation till the recognition and verification procedure is complete. Under Section 5 of F.R.A., Gram Sabha is, inter-alia, empowered to ensure the decision taken in Gram Sabha to regulate access to community forest resources and stop any activity which adversely affects the wild animals, forest and the biodiversity are complied with. As per the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation Resettlement Act 2013, its main objective is to ensure, in consultation with institutions of local self-government and Gram Sabha, a humane, participative, informed and transparent process for land acquisition with the least disturbance to the owners of the land and other affected families and provide just and fair compensation to the affected families whose land has been acquired or proposed to be acquired. As per Section 41 (1) of RFCTLARR Act, 2013, as far as possible, no acquisition of land shall be made in the Scheduled Areas. As per Section 14 (2), where such acquisition does take place, it shall be done only as a demonstrable last resort. As per Section 41 (3), in case of acquisition or alteration of any land in Scheduled Areas, the prior consent of the concerned Gram Sabha or the Panchayats or the autonomous District Councils, at the appropriate level in Scheduled Areas under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, as the case may be, shall be obtained, in all cases of land acquisition in such areas, including acquisition in case of urgency, before issue of a notification under the Act, or any other Central Act or a State Act for the time being in force. As per the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Area) Act of 1996, the Gram Sabha or Panchayats shall be consulted before making the acquisition of land in the Scheduled Areas or development projects and before resettling or rehabilitating persons affected by such projects in the Scheduled Areas. According to Schedule V of the Constitution, the Governor of the State which has Scheduled Areas is empowered to prohibit or restrict transfer of land from tribals and regulate the allotment of land to members of the Scheduled Tribes in such cases’¹ (Saruta 2019).

In 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government brought an Ordinance to amend the RFCTLARR Act of 2013, which had come into existence under the Congress- led UPA regime. The Land Act of 2013 had replaced the colonial- era Land Acquisition Act of 1894, which permitted forcible acquisition of land. The new government at the Centre brought an Ordinance to amend the 2013 Act by promulgating the RFCTLARR (Amendment) Ordinance, 2014. The government sought to amend some key features of the 2013 Act, which the opposition protested because to them these were efforts to ‘dilute’ the original provisions and thereby grabbing land from the tribals would be made far easier. For instance, the 2014 Ordinance of amendment ‘sought to empower the government of exempting 5 categories of projects- from the requirements of “determination of social impact and public purpose”, and “special provision to safeguard food security”. Besides, it also exempted these categories of projects from the “consent” clause² (Sharma 2020). It means that under the 2013 Act, it needed the consent of 70 percent of families, where the land would be taken for public private partnership projects, and 80 percent of families would need to give consent before a land is taken for private projects. But the new Ordinance sought to remove the prerequisite condition of taking consent in these 5 categories of projects, mentioned above. Secondly, it ‘also exempted these projects from having to go through a social impact assessment- a study by independent experts to determine a project’s impact on people’s land and livelihoods, and its economic, social and cultural consequences, in consultation with affected communities³(BBC 2015).

Demographic Situation of the Scheduled Tribes

The tribal population of India constitutes 8.2 percent of the total India’s population, that is, about 84,326,240 people, as per the Census of 2011⁴(Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner 2011). It further states that the literacy rate among the tribals is 58.95 percent and the sex ratio is 990⁵(ST Data, Census 2011). Percentage of Scheduled Tribe population living below the poverty line in the country around 2011-12 was 24.1 percent.⁶ (Annual Report, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, GOI 2016-17: 30) Landless households deriving major part of their income from manual casual labour was a whopping 35.65 percent, tribal households with salaried jobs in government was 4.36 percent only and a meagre 4.48 percent of tribal households in India had the monthly income of the highest earning member in the family greater than Rs. 10,000. Moreover, only 3.43 percent

of the tribal households had refrigerators at home and a whopping percentage of 57.39 of households did not have any access to either landline or mobile connection.⁷ (Annual Report 2016-17:31) According to the Census 2011 data, only 22.6 percent Scheduled Tribe households had latrine facilities in their house premises⁸(Annual Report 2016-17: 32). It further shows that less than 20 percent of the Scheduled Tribe households had drinking water facilities in their house premises. About 39.1 percent of the Scheduled Tribe population had to depend on hand pumps away from their houses for drinking water, 28.2 percent went to wells away from their house premises, 1.9 percent went to tank/pond/lakes and 4.2 percent depended on rivers and canals away from their homes for finding drinking water⁹(Annual Report 2016-17: 33). As far as their professional profile was concerned, based on the report formulated during the 70th round of National Sample Survey (NSS) around January-December 2013, 50.95 percent of the Scheduled Tribe population depended on self-employed cultivation, 0.75 percent on livestock farming, 3.75 percent other/allied agricultural activities, 32.90 percent had salaried employment¹⁰(Annual Report 2016-17: 34).

The Promised Path

Given this grim situation, true development of the tribal population of the country called for continuous and sincere efforts. At such a crucial juncture, there occurred a change in the government at the Centre in 2014. The rightist Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) came to power with a thumping majority. The election manifesto of the party before the 2014 General Elections, did manage to kindle hopes in some sections of the society. It promised a “vibrant and participative democracy, empowered and inspired people, inclusive and sustainable development, basic amenities to all, pro-active, pro- people good governance, a shift to representative to participatory democracy, developmental process a people’s movement - Jan bhagidari, actively involve people in policy formulation and evaluation, people - centric good governance, government of the poor, marginalized and left behind”¹¹(*BJP Election Manifesto* 2014). However, in last six years, the country as well as some states has seen a phenomenal rise in reported incidences of tribal eviction due to developmental projects, without consent or proper rehabilitation, apparently not only in contradiction to the proposed and promised path that we had set out on but also flouting the established laws of the land. In the following pages, an effort will be made to highlight some of these incidents.

The Statue of Unity

The statue of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, or more popularly, the Statue of Unity has been recently built in the Narmada District of Gujarat. For the purpose of its construction, the State government has evicted about 75,000 tribals¹²(NDTV 2018). To the displaced tribals, the ‘tallest’ statue of the world could not stand tall on the values of Sardar Patel of seeing a united India, a non- violent India and a country for everyone living on its territory. The project, which was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in October 2018, met with stiff non- violent opposition from the tribal population in the State. They chose the Gandhian way of Satyagraha to protest their eviction for the construction of the statue of a visionary who was a staunch Gandhian himself. Dr. Praful Vasava, a tribal leader in the Narmada District had remarked ahead of the inauguration, “No food will be cooked in 72 villages affected by the entire project, as we will be mourning on that day. The project is being carried out for our destruction. Our rights as tribals are being violated by the government. Sardar Patel’s honour should be maintained. We are not against this development even, but this government’s development idea is lopsided and against the tribals”¹³(NDTV 2018).

As far as the rehabilitation of the displaced tribals for the project is concerned, “The government took away our land and only paid us money for it, but other commitments like alternative land, providing jobs to the affected have not been carried out as per the rehabilitation package, according to the Narmada Tribunal Authority”¹⁴(NDTV 2018). Not only the tribals in the Narmada District, but also across the entire eastern belt of tribal population in Gujarat, including more than 72 villages, were protesting against the unveiling of the statue before the inauguration. The sarpanchas of affected villages wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister of the country. The tribal population has always had a very intimate relationship with nature. Evicting them from their habitual place of dwelling and cultivation has a severe effect on their well- being. In the open letter, the villagers wrote, “These forests, rivers, waterfalls, land and agriculture supported us for generations. We survived on them. But, everything is being destroyed now and celebrations are also planned. Don’t you think it’s akin to celebrating someone’s death? We feel so”¹⁵(*The Economic Times* 2018). It is to be noted that the rehabilitation of evicted tribals have not yet been completed despite the fact that more than 2 years have passed since its inauguration.

As per a Report which was published in June 2020, as many as tribals of 19 villages were yet to have any rehabilitation. They were living in temporary

shelters¹⁶(Patel 2020). It further states, ‘The Statue of Unity is only 3.2 km from the Shoolpaneshwar Sanctuary. According to a Supreme Court order dated December 4, 2006, if a project requiring environmental clearance is located within a 10-km radius of a wildlife sanctuary or national park, the project requires the approval of the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife’¹⁷(Patel 2020). In this case, after the then Chief Minister of Gujarat Narendra Modi first announced this project on 7th October 2010 facing Narmada Dam, environmentalists from across the country started writing to the Union Environment Ministry that such a project would have severe ramifications for the ecological balance in the region and the work on the project had started without even obtaining any basic environmental clearance¹⁸(Seth and Raval 2014). The Land Act of 2013 clearly stipulates that compulsorily there would have to be given employment to one member of the affected family. It is alleged that such a condition has not been fulfilled in this case. Even the proposed amendment to this Act, which was brought in the Lok Sabha in December 2014, had talked of hassle free mechanism for grievances redressal of land losers. Obviously, this prerequisite condition has not been met. Furthermore, as per the Land Act of 2013, Panchayat’s nod will be compulsory for acquiring tribal land. In this case, sarpanchas of 22 villages protested vehemently, boycotted the inauguration after they wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister before the inauguration and all their pleas fell onto deaf ears.

The Hasdeo Arand Forest in Chhattisgarh

The Hasdeo Arand Forest, a pristine contiguous forest covering about 1,70,000 hectares is located in Chhattisgarh. Beneath the forest there is a huge stretch of coalfield, known as the Hasdeo coalfield. Although the coal mining sector is primarily controlled by the public sector company, ‘Coal India’, Hasdeo Arand forest, reportedly having more than billion metric tons of coal reserves has attracted much attention from private players, who operate solely from its personal profit motive. This region is rich in biodiversity and several threatened animal species inhabit the forest. This is also the homeland of Gond Adivasis. They are one of the largest tribal groups in India and are to be found in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. According to the 2011 Census of India, there were about 2.98 million people who speak the Gondi language.

At one point of time in this region, because of its importance in terms of biodiversity and because of the dependence of the Gondi people on this

forest for their lives and livelihood, mining was not permitted. In fact, till 2011, mining in Hasdeo Arand forest was legally prohibited. In 2012, permission of mining in the block was given when Raman Singh of Bharatiya Janata Party was the Chief Minister. However, in 2012, when the clearance was given for the block, it was assured that no mining would be allowed in the middle of the forest¹⁹(Suresh 2020). But that definitely did not happen as by 2013, the Adani Group started the Parsa East and Kete Basan open cast mine in the region²⁰(Cassey 2020). Now more open cast mines have been approved by the government of Narendra Modi. An estimated 80 percent of the entire forest area - and 30 villages - may be lost²¹(Cassey 2020). The Union environment ministry apparently has no qualms about it, whatsoever. A Report published in the Hindustan Times remarked, 'The Parsa mine - open cast mining involves digging for coal after removing all the vegetation and soil from the area - came up for consideration of the environment ministry's Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC), thrice before clearance was fully granted on February 21, 2019'²²(Nandi 2019).

The Land Act of 2013 states that the Panchayat's nod will be compulsory for acquiring tribal land. But in this case, 'On February 20, the Chhattisgarh Bachao Andolan wrote to the EAC on environmental and legal concerns related to the project. In a letter, it suggested that two villages in north Chhattisgarh's Surguja district complained to the district collector that Gram Sabha consent was allegedly forged'²³(Nandi 2019). The Gond Adivasis there today are staring at an uncertain future as the core central areas of the Hasdeo Arand forest have been thrown open to mining by the Chhattisgarh government to the Adani Group. Reportedly, there are not less than 18 active coal blocks in the Hasdeo Arand region.

Mining in the Parsa East and Kete Basan block started in 2013 by the Adani Mining, which is a subsidiary of the Adani Group. However, the ownership of this block is in the hands of Rajasthan Rajya Vidyut Utpadan Nigam Limited. The Adani Mining extracts the coal and transports it to Rajasthan for thermal power generation there. The Sahlinullah and Ketenullah which used to flow perennially in the region have now dried up after the open cast mines were constructed. The tribals there used to depend on these streams for their drinking and irrigation necessities. It was also reported that the waste from the mines were dumped in these streams, which have even caused deaths of a few people in Sahli. Also, near Kete, an elephant corridor existed. The opening up of the mines have increased the man- elephant conflict in the region and loss of lives and farm produce have become a regular feature since then.

Change of Land Laws in Jharkhand

The government in Jharkhand led by Raghubar Das of Bharatiya Janata Party, in November 2016, managed to ‘usurp’ its majority in the House and passed the Chotanagpur Tenancy (CNT) and Santhal Pargana Tenancy (SPT) Act amendment bill 2016. The amendment allowed transfer of agricultural land, owned by tribals, and put it for non- agricultural use, besides allowing the government to take possession of the land for state development projects²⁴(The Economic Times 2016). The amendment was passed despite widespread protests across the State. Highlighting the situation, a news report in the Frontline mentioned, ‘On October 22, in an incident that did not evoke much outrage, the police opened fire on tribal people in Seko village in Khunti district in Jharkhand, killing one person and critically injuring at least five others. This is the third such incident since August this year... The day after the firing, the tribal people refused to cremate the body of the deceased, leading to further clashes with the administration. Nearly 1,500 unnamed persons were booked under the various cases.’²⁵(Rajalakshmi 2016) With the situation spiraling out of control, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, after inaugurating the first- ever national tribal carnival in New Delhi, tried to diffuse the tension by issuing a strong warning to everyone who is trying to tweak the rights of the tribal people. He made it known his displeasure towards abuse of the tribal people for the sake of exploiting the forests and natural resources. However, the BJP government’s activities in Jharkhand were in total contradiction. Section 71 (A) subsection (2) of the CNT, which dealt with the very crucial issue of tribal land transfer after compensation, has now been abolished after the amendment was passed. ‘In Jharkhand there are around 64,000 cases pending under Schedule V... and by abolishing 71 (A)(2) these claims are likely to null and void’²⁶(Gupta 2017). It is feared that these amendments will only help private players to grab tribal lands. These amendments also negate the spirit and sacrifices made in several tribal uprisings to put Jharkhand under the protective measures of Schedule V of the Constitution of India. The Pathalgadi movement gained ground in Jharkhand during this time to counter the ‘ill- conceived’ policies of the Raghubar Das government and to assert the rights of the tribal people over Jal-Jungle-Jameen (water, forest, land). Eventually, the Bharatiya Janata Party lost the assembly elections of Jharkhand in 2019 and experts opine that the tribal anger due to the arrogance of the then Chief Minister Raghubar Das were the main reasons behind this defeat.

Besides the change of pro-tribal land laws in Jharkhand, the Adani project has also invited the wrath of the tribal population. In 2016, a village called Mali in Jharkhand, which is situated about 380 km east of Ranchi, along with nine other surrounding villages suddenly became much sought-after territories. It is at this time that Mr. Gautam Adani, Supremo of the Adani Group communicated its proposal to the BJP government in the State that it wanted to build a coal-fired 1600 MW plant on over 2000 acres of land in the Godda district. The plant is supposed to be commissioned in 2022 and the total amount of electricity that will be generated from this plant will be sold to Bangladesh through high-tension lines. During PM Modi's visit to Bangladesh in August 2015, Bangladesh sought power transmission from India and Mr. Gautam Adani was reportedly one of the industrialists accompanying the PM on the tour. However, the project has since been shrouded in controversy and protests over 'forcible' land takeover. Such reports from villages in Godda District, such as, Mali, Moti, Nayabad, Gangtaetc became a daily affair. Such a Report published in the Business Standard read as follows, 'Soon after police personnel drove up in a convoy of vehicles that Friday, August 31, 2018, "Adanike log (Adani's people)" arrived with earthmoving equipment, recounted Adivasi (tribal) and Dalit villagers in Mali, in this lush eastern corner of Jharkhand. "There were 8 to 10 police for each of us villagers", said Sita Murmu, a wiry farmer in her 40s from the Santal community, one of India's largest indigenous tribes, describing the attempt that followed to take over the villagers' farmlands, abutting a clutch of mud and brick homes. These fertile, multi-crop lands are the only source of livelihood, and the villagers were shocked when the earthmovers began uprooting valuable palm trees and bulldozing the young paddy stalks, laboriously sown weeks ago. "We begged Adani's people to stop", said Santali farmer Anil Hembrom. "But they said our land was theirs now, that the government had given it to them". Villagers said they made urgent phone calls for help to Godda's Deputy Commissioner (DC) and the Superintendent of Police (SP). "The SP told us, 'Go to the local thaana (police station) and lodge a complaint,'" they recalled. "We told him, 'how can we lodge a complaint at the thaana, when the police from there are here with Adani.'" The DC too ignored their pleas, villagers said, recalling, "She said, "Your money (compensation for the land) is lying in the government office. Go, take it.'" Meanwhile, Adani personnel were casting concretine wire to fence off the land, and a farm pond. Santalis bury their dead on their land, and the earthmovers dug up this clan's burial site too, the farmers recalled'²⁷(Choudhury 2018).

Why the Godda Project has reasons to worry for tribals in Odisha?

Adani's under-construction Godda project in Jharkhand has already had ramifications for Adivasis, moving well beyond the territory of Jharkhand. This is because it has been reported that the coal supply for the Godda power plant will be brought from Australia's Galilea Basin in Queensland and it will be shipped to the Dhamra Port in Odisha. Therefore, the South Eastern Railways have been engaged to construct railway line for carrying coal from the Dhamra Port in Odisha to the Godda Power Plant in Jharkhand. For constructing this railway line, it has been reported that about 700 Adivasi families will be displaced. In that case, the Adivasi residents will have to be provided with adequate compensation, including 7 acres of land and a job in the railways. However, no such assurance has come from any source so far, and the authorities seem to be in a hurry to begin construction²⁸(Dasgupta 2020). That is why, the Adivasis are regularly confronting the railway workers at Barhabans village in Odisha, and the authorities are resorting to coercive measures such as filing First Information Report (FIR) against agitating tribals to muzzle the protest.

Aarey Forest in Maharashtra

In 2019, the plight of tribals in Maharashtra came to our notice with developmental plans in the Aarey forest region. This forest is an urban forest, more popularly known as the 'green lung' of the city of Mumbai. It is a suburban region of Mumbai and is situated within the Sanjay Gandhi National Park. The State government of Maharashtra in 2019 made known its plan to cut down about 2,700 trees to make way for a car shed for the Aarey metro²⁹(Tapasya 2019). 'On October 4 (2019), the Bombay High Court gave a go ahead for the cutting of trees in Aarey. Overnight, hundreds of trees were allegedly razed as protesters were detained. All the entrances to Aarey were blocked by the police. However, environmentalists, Aarey tribals, and the people of Mumbai opposing the move gathered at different locations- Powai Police Station, Thane Local Train Station and Aarey Police Check Post- to protest and express dismay'³⁰(Tapasya 2019). The tribals in Aarey are staring at an uncertain future with possibilities of them being displaced for the project, without proper rehabilitation taking into account their lives, culture and way of living holistically. Aarey has 27 tribal *padas*, or hamlets, with an Adivasi population of over 10,000³¹(*The Indian Express* 2019)After much hue and cry by the green crusaders, the Supreme Court on October 7, 2019, ordered the BJP government that no more trees should be axed in Aarey and ordered to maintain the status quo. In this case,

reportedly 29 activists were arrested for protesting against the felling of trees. They were later given bail.

Conclusion

A few case- studies in a few States in the country can in no way deal holistically with the complex issue of displacement of tribals due to faulty developmental policies in the country. However, the purpose of this article is to discuss a few incidents in the country that prick our conscience dearly. What if the developmental policies that we are adopting are not sustainable? What if those are not pro-people? What if those are not pro- poor? What if those are not pro- backward strata in the society? What if those are destroying the environment and ecological balance in the country? What if those are filling up the pockets and coffers of select entrepreneurs and business conglomerates and alienating a section of our brethren? What if it forces us to question, seventy-one years after the adoption of the Preamble to the Constitution of India, if at all “We, the people of India” makes any sense today? This is because, if really we had given “to ourselves this constitution” of a free, liberated, nascent nation, then where did “we” get lost in the process of development? Is a country merely a geographical border, a fixed territory, some skyscrapers bearing testimony to the rising Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and a government to rule us over? But then the question that arises is how to define ‘development’? The United Nations define development as a ‘multidimensional undertaking to achieve a higher quality of life for all people. Economic development, social development and environmental protection are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of Sustainable Development’³²(UNDocumentation-Development). Going by this definition, we have not only fallen short of bringing ‘development’ in the country, in fact, we have acted to the contrary. These incidents merely prove to be a narrative of failing our own people. It is not that eviction of tribals have suddenly started taking place in the country since last five-six years, but it is certainly that adoption of these displacement-induced developmental policies have apparently intensified in last few years. Moreover, private conglomerates are seen to have been given a freer hand in defining development the way they want to, and in most cases, the government authorities are reportedly hand in glove with them and with their modus operandi. The government has even tried to amend laws by bringing in Ordinances, both at the Centre and in States, to make land acquisition easier. The ‘Father of our Nation’, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi has always believed in the concept of ‘trusteeship’, that is, the

State must be looked upon as the repository of public trust and public resources, and the State must function on behalf of the public as the resources legitimately belong to the public and the State must protect them. But, we fear when we see that draft notification has been issued to revise the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA), which proposes to do away with environment clearance altogether for the purpose of ‘ease of doing business’³³(Trivedi 2020). ‘The draft exempts 40 types of projects from prior environmental clearance. The most worrying aspect of the draft notification, according to experts, is the introduction of post- facto clearance of projects. This goes against a Supreme Court order delivered on April 1, 2020 in *Alembic Pharmaceuticals vs Rohit Prajapati and Others* that held ex post facto environmental clearances contrary to law. “Environment law cannot countenance the notion of an ex post facto clearance. This would be contrary to both the precautionary principle as well as the need for sustainable development. The concept of an ex post facto environmental clearance is in derogation of the fundamental principles of environmental jurisprudence and is an anathema to the EIA notification dated 27 January 1994. It is, as the judgment in *Common Cause* holds, detrimental to the environment and could lead to irreparable degradation,” the apex court observed. On March 12 (2020), the Ministry (of Environment, Forests and Climate Change) released the 2020 draft notification online in English and Hindi. On April 11 (2020), it published the notification in the Gazette of India. It fixed 60 days as the deadline for receiving feedback on the draft from the public. Apparently, 17 lakh letters and emails were received by the Ministry in response to the draft. But on July 23, the cyber-crime cell of the Special Cell, Delhi Police, sent a notice under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) to Fridays for Future (FFF) India, a people’s movement for climate justice, for challenging the “sovereignty and integrity of India”. The website of FFF India was blocked along with two other environmental groups, *Let India Breathe* and *There is no Earth*. Several environmentalists wondered whether writing to a Minister constituted attacking the sovereignty of India’³⁴ (Trivedi 2020). We had set out on the journey to find whether Foucault’s conceptualization of ‘Biopolitics’ finds its resonance in today’s democratic societies. It seems truly, under the guise of development and welfare, the State tends to control their lives. With the guardian forsaking them and refusing to even listen to their anguish, the Adivasis or the original inhabitants of the country are striving hard to find their rightful place in ‘New India’ that aims to be ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ and in this regard has pledged to bring ‘Samajik Nyay (social justice) and Samajik Samrasata (social harmony), to be complemented with economic

justice and political empowerment³⁵(BJP Election Manifesto 2014). We hope and pray that true social harmony prevails in the society.

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