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Perpetuating Ethical Numbness: The Plight Of Ecological Refugees

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Abstract: The paper entitled “Perpetuating Ethical Numbness: The Plight of Ecological Refugees” demonstrates how the eco developmental projects such as conservation of biodiversity and construction of mega dams have not only deteriorated the ecosystem, but also deprived the tribal or indigenous people of their traditional means of livelihood. India ranks second in terms of tribal population. Tribal people are often referred to as “adivasis” which means original inhabitants of the land. India has nearly 360 tribal groups who speak over 100 languages and dialects. Since nearly 90 percent of the tribal population depend on forests and forest resources, displacing them in the name of development would deprive them of their familiar environment, homeland and livelihood options, thereby affecting their well-being. An attempt has been made to unveil the adverse effects of the eco developmental projects on the tribal people and their resistance to restore the lost ancestral lands with reference to C. K. Janu's *Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C. K. Janu*.

Key words: Eco developmental projects, ecological destruction, environmental degradation, indigenous people, displacement, poverty, underdevelopment, ecological refugees.

You cannot live a political life, you cannot live a moral life if you're not willing to open your eyes and see the world more clearly. See some of the injustice that's going on. Try to make yourself aware of what's happening in the world. And when you are aware, you have a responsibility to act.

- Bill Ayers, cofounder of the Weather Underground

The large scale developmental projects in less developed countries contribute to various forms of ecological destruction and environmental degradation. Economic globalization, trade



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liberal policy, privatization and modernization have not only deteriorated the ecosystem, but also deprived the tribal or indigenous people of their traditional means of livelihood. In the name of Eco developmental projects such as conservation of biodiversity and construction of mega dams, and other developmental projects like construction of roads, railways and industries tribal people and poor agricultural peasants are displaced from their lands and are left with less livelihood options. In other words, the life sustaining resources of the tribal or the indigenous people are explored and exploited by the transnational corporations and elite class of the less developed countries in the name of developmental projects. As Rajkishor Meher remarks, “In the name of modernizing backward countries and regions and civilizing the ‘less civilized’ indigenous people in these areas, the current form of LPG development is creating wealth for the modernizing elites at the cost of the livelihood and security of the indigenous peoples in these areas.” Foreign direct investment (FDI) and technologies are invited to exploit the unlimited natural resources of the backward areas where the indigenous people reside over, just because, the government and the elite class of the less developed nations believe that these mega developmental projects “will increase export earnings and accelerate economic growth, which in turn will develop basic infrastructure and bring about the progressive socioeconomic transformation of the indigenous population” (458). But in reality, these developmental projects do no good to the indigenous people. They are dispossessed of their lands and are deprived of their life sustaining livelihood options. As Arundhati Roy elucidates, “They’re a brazen means of taking water, land and irrigation away from the poor and gifting it to the rich. Their reservoirs displace huge populations of people, leaving them homeless and destitute” (57). In short, these mega developmental projects only benefit the multinational corporations and a few elite classes at the expense of the lives of the tribal people.

India ranks second in terms of tribal population. Tribal people are often referred to as “adivasis” which means original inhabitants of the land. India has nearly 360 tribal groups who speak over 100 languages and dialects. According to the presidential order, they are categorised under the scheduled tribes (STs) since 1950). These tribal groups generally live in the forests and hilly regions which are often termed as the backward regions of the country. They fully depend on the forest and the agricultural lands for their survival. Hunting, foraging and cultivation of lands are



the traditional means of their livelihood options (Mallavarapu 35). Since nearly 90 percent of the tribal population depend on forests and forest resources, displacing them in the name of development would deprive them of their familiar environment, homeland and livelihood options, thereby affecting their well-being.

It becomes significant to know the three major economies of the world such as nature's economy, sustenance economy and market economy to understand how the mega developmental projects affect the overall well-being of the commons. Nature's economy is the primary economy of the world. In this economy, the goods and services are produced by nature such as "the water recycled and distributed through the hydrologic cycle, the soil fertility produced by microorganisms, the plants fertilized by pollinators" (Shiva 16). These natural resources are produced and reproduced by ecological processes. Sustenance economy is the economy in which the people work directly with nature to create a favourable condition for their living. The sustenance economy is engaged in "craft production, peasant agriculture, artisanal fishing, and indigenous forest economies" (Shiva 17). Nature's economy and sustenance economy offer sustenance and support to all human activities. The dominant global market economy depends on these major economies for their profits. So as to accumulate capital, the global market economy destroys the ecological process by over-exploiting the resources of nature. The rapid economic growth produced by the destruction of livelihoods and the unlimited exploitation of the resources of nature's economy and sustenance economy would eventually lead to underdevelopment and poverty. As Shiva elucidates:

The poverty of the Third World has resulted from centuries of the drain of resources from the sustenance economy. Globalization has accelerated and expanded the methods used to deplete the sustenance economy—the privatization of water, the patenting of seeds and biodiversity, and the corporatization of agriculture. This deliberate starving of the sustenance economy is at the root of the violence of globalization. (17-18)

Hence, it is obvious that the global developmental projects which destroy the sustenance and livelihood options of the commons will result in poverty and underdevelopment.



The Developmental projects often result in the displacement of the indigenous people from their own ancestral lands. In projects such as the construction of industrial plants, roads and railway lines displacement of people is more visible than in Eco developmental projects such as conservation of biodiversity, construction of dams and canals. Displacement is often carried out by forcible or involuntary eviction. This kind of forced displacement deprives the basic needs of the tribal people such as home, livestock assets, livelihood options and familiar environment which in turn result in the sense of estrangement, alienation and insecurity. Roy comments, "India's Adivasi people have a greater claim to being indigenous to this land than anybody else, and how are they treated by the state and its minions? Oppressed, cheated, robbed of their lands, shunted around like surplus goods" (34). Since tribal people and their histories, their customs, their deities are considered dispensable; they must learn to sacrifice everything they once possessed for the greater common good of the nation (35).

Globalization accumulates wealth by the enclosure of common properties which are the collective assets of the poor. It is said that the enclosures would bring growth and prosperity to all. However, in reality, it brings unprecedented poverty to the common people. For instance, the enclosure of forests from the indigenous people to the state benefits the private paper and pulp industry by providing them with cheap raw materials. So also the mega dams, which are built in the name of common good, aim to satisfy the water needs of the global corporations and private industries (Shiva 30). Hence, it is apparent that globalization and its developmental projects benefit only a few at the expense of the majority.

Earlier people are displaced in the name of nation-building, but now it still continues under the cover of economic growth of the country. In other words, the shift from nation-building to globalization has accelerated displacement by development. According to a recent report, over 60 million people have been displaced during the last 60 years (Mathur 3).

Meher comments on the waves of economic transformation and its effects on the tribal people as:

It should be noted that during the first wave of economic transformations that led to the birth of settled agricultural economies, the indigenous peoples were pushed into the hilly and



mountainous regions by the more technologically advanced sections of the population. Now in the current era of globalization in the name of modernization and higher economic development, they are being pushed into oblivion and displaced by the modernizing invaders. (459)

The adverse effects of displacement on the indigenous people caused by the developmental projects are hard to assess. Roy points out the negligent behaviour of the government towards the displaced indigenous people as, “the government has not commissioned a post-project evaluation of a single one of its 3,600 dams to gauge whether or not it has achieved what it set out to achieve, whether or not the (always phenomenal) costs were justified, or even what the costs actually were” (59). According to the national and state rehabilitation and resettlement (R and R) policy, the displaced tribals should be provided with “land to land or cash compensation”. Minimum agricultural wages (MAWs) must be given as an additional means of financial support to the project affected persons for the loss of customary or grazing rights. They should be relocated in the nearby area “so that they retain their ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity”. Additional lands can be offered for the purpose of community and religious gatherings. Representatives of project affected people should be included in the rehabilitation and resettlement (R and R) committee (Mallavarapu 37).

In essence, the displaced tribal people are often promised to provide decent compensation with proper rehabilitation and resettlement (R and R). However, it has not been implemented as promised. As a result, the extent of their suffering has increased to greater heights. If they have been resettled to a place which has equivalent or better living conditions, their problems would have reduced except the sense of loss of their accustomed place which could easily fade away with the better standard of living. However, in reality, the tribal or indigenous people are provided with insufficient compensation. They are often resettled in worse lands where there are less livelihood options and even their lives are under threat. In the process of relocation, they not only lose their assets and life sustaining livelihood options, but also encounter the socio-economic and cultural issues such as social exclusion and discrimination. Thus, Meher comments, “Their status changes from self-sustaining members of their local ecosystem to ecological refugees who are forced into



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the slums of the large urban centres and urban-industrial towns created by the development pathologies of our time” (459).

Apart from the establishment of mining and mineral-based industries, the government concentrates more on the Eco developmental projects such as construction of multipurpose dams and conservation of biodiversity like national parks and sanctuaries. The acquisition and exploitation of tribal lands and resources has become a common phenomenon in recent decades due to the State and Multi-National Companies (MNCs) sponsored developmental projects such as large scale irrigational projects, dams, reservoirs, mining, industries, sanctuaries, and tourism projects. For instance, tribal groups such as Konda Reddis and Nayakapods of Reddigudem and Lakshmipuram villages respectively are displaced due to the “Kovvada Reservoir” project in West Godavari Agency and Yandai tribals have been dispossessed of their lands due to Tiger Sanctuary at Srisailem without any proper rehabilitation and resettlement (R and R) package. The government of Andhra Pradesh has initiated the Kovvada reservoir project to meet the required water supply for the agricultural lands of the non-tribals and for the industries in the uplands. It is said that this project would promote the agricultural productivity, thereby improving the economy through cultivation. But in reality, the tribals have been forcefully evicted by the immigrant non-tribal settlers and the project officials. The government officials have decided to provide compensation of Rs. 80,000 and Rs. 60,000 per acre for cashew orchards and plain lands respectively. However,

The oustees struggled for about 4 -5 years to collect their land compensation and spent most of the compensation amount towards bribes to Government officials and the extensive travels they made to the Government offices. Rest of the compensation amount was paid to the money lenders to clear off their debts. (Mallavarapu 39)

Finally, as a result, these tribals and poor peasants are marginalised and pushed into the periphery. This in turn results in the large scale migration to the urban areas. Since they lack the required skills, they couldn't find any employment opportunity in the urban centre and at last end up in rag-picking, rickshaw-pulling and even as bonded labour (Mallavarapu 38-39).

Kerala is well-known for its socio-economic developments in recent decades. The government policies aim to achieve quality human development in terms of high standard of living,



good education and proper medical care. However, these developmental projects exclude the tribal or the indigenous people of Kerala. Wayanad district of Kerala has the largest concentration of tribal inhabitants. This mountainous region covers vast plains, large scale cultivable lands and dense forest area. Attappadi region in Palakkad district has the second largest tribal population. The tribal or the indigenous people form the majority of forest dwellers. They completely depend on the forest and forest resources for their life subsistence. Hunting, foraging and cultivation are some of their primary ways of livelihoods. The forest dwellers are contented with their traditional ways of living and have led a peaceful life.

On one side, the self-sufficient lives of the tribals have been disrupted by the non-tribal migrants from Tamil Nadu and Travancore after 1930s. These non-tribal settlers have forcefully evicted the tribals of their home lands and pushed them into the marginalised state of living. Bhaskaran remarks:

The largely self-sufficient, culturally distinct way of life of the tribals fast eroded, as their traditional methods of cultivation- slash and burn-and their crops- *Ragi, Cholam and Thina* – were substituted with more commercially viable methods and crops. (*Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C.K. Janu* VI)

On the other side, the government Eco developmental project of wild life sanctuary in Wayanad district has displaced the tribals of their lands, deprived them of their livestock assets and sustaining livelihoods. 1975 and 1976 government statistical reports show 57 percent and 61 percent of tribals are landless respectively. Bhaskaran comments,

This indicated the rapidity with which they were (losing their lands. Even the Kerala Land Reform Act of 1957, which was introduced by the Communists and was termed ‘progressive’, could not come in the way of transfer of tribal lands, as there were enough loopholes for circumvention. (vii-viii)

C. K. Janu’s *Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C. K. Janu* unfolds the self-sustaining life of the tribals and their symbiotic relationship with the forest lands by narrating her own childhood experiences in the mother forest. It discloses the adverse effects of the ecodevelopmental projects such as setting up of wild life sanctuaries and conservation of national parks on the tribal people of



Wayanad district. The story not only explores their fears to lose their cultural identity, sustaining livelihood options and their intimate bond with the mother nature, but also their resistance and protest to restore the lost ancestral lands. In short, it exhibits how the tribal and indigenous people of Kerala become the victims of its developmental projects.

The tribal or indigenous people have a symbiotic relationship with the forest they dwell in. C.K. Janu's childhood experience not only unfolds their traditional means of livelihoods such as fishing and foraging, but also reveals their intimate bond with nature. She narrates:

When young all of us children would go the ridges of the fields to pick chappa or to the little stream to catch fish or else to lure out the crabs hiding in the slush of the fields or to graze the Jenmi's cattle or to roam aimlessly in the woods or to pluck wild fruits like karappayam mothangappayam or kanjippayam kanjippayam was plentiful. When eaten it turned our tongues blood-red or we would look for honey in the tall trees or ... bring home pieces of cane in the forests one never knew what hunger was we would dig up wild tubers and eat them once we started digging for the roots we kept digging till we got to them. Sometimes for a whole day. (2)

This passage indicates their self-sufficient and their distinctive way of living. Since the forest they dwell in provides them everything in abundance, they have led a contented and uninterrupted life. To them, "the forest is mother to us more than a mother because she never abandons us" (5).

The tribals build high wooden platforms between the trees to aim at their prey and to safeguard their crops from the wild animals. Although their's is a tough life, they enjoy the beauty associated with it. The tribals work as labourers in the fields of Jenmi (feudal landlords). The fields in which they work as labourers were once belong to the tribals. In fact, they are their ancestral property from which the tribals have been forcefully evicted and pushed into the worst wastelands of the forest. Janu explains how the tribal or indigenous people have become landless labourers as:

The hillsides the mountains the plantations the field and what not in that area belonged to them after our forefathers had toiled so much to clear the woods and burn the undergrowth



and convert the hillsides into fields they had taken them over as their own that's how all our lands become theirs. (*Mother Forest* 15)

Now in the fields of Jenmi, they do back-breaking works such as:

Digging up the soil with spades sowing pulling out the seedlings transplanting them weeding watering reaping carrying the sheaves of corn and such. again picking the left over ears of corn from the harvested field then more work like threshing drying the straw in the sun tying up the hay into sheaves and piling up haystacks. (1)

Men, women and children all work hard in the fields to get meagre wages. After harvest, they have been given grains as wages. Janu recollects those nights of harvest. When they are returning back home with the grains they have received as wages, they could hear the music of chini and thudi being played as a sign of happiness. She remarks that they are not truly happy simply because they have got a very low wage for the work they put in the fields. They are too scared to raise their voice against the feudal lords. Their unquestioning acceptance is revealed through her words, "there never was a tradition of protesting when the wages were low nor in other communities. Our people were also not used to going anywhere beyond the fields or the forests" (16).

The rainy season is the most unpleasant period of their life. It throws light on their marginalized state of living. During the rainy season, they could leave the field "only after planting the whole field". When they get wet while working in the fields, they don't possess a spare clothe to change. They often get nothing to eat as they could not gather food products from the forest during rainy season. Only when it stops raining, could they gather something to fill their stomach. It is also understood that the wage they earn by breaking their backs in the fields is not enough to stave off hunger. Janu reports:

It would be quite dark by the time we reached our hovels even after reaching them we could not be able to sleep immediately. We would be so hungry and cold. It was impossible to kindle the fire in the hearth. We would eat some *chakka* or *thina*. The little one would sleep even without that we wouldn't be able to see each other since we had no lights anyway everyone must look the same when hungry. (*Mother Forest* 14)



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It is evident from the words of C.K. Janu that the dispossession of forest lands, which comforts the tribes, deprives them of their basic needs and life sustaining options.

The tribals have been completely deprived of their lands and livelihoods by the migrants from the South, the modernising invaders of the globalized India. They plant coffee and eat chakka and kappa like the tribals do. The jennis only looted the lands from the indigenous people, whereas the migrant non-tribal settlers not only take over the good cultivable lands from them, but also enslave their men in return for toddy and arrack. It is said that the arrival of the migrants is good as it opens up a space to the tribals to mingle with the civil society. However, in reality, the tribals are completely ruined by these settlers. Janu reports:

Our people had turned into mere wage labourers. Mother Forest had turned into the Departmental Forest. It had barbed wire fences and guards. Our children had begun to be frightened of a forest that could no longer accommodate them. All the land belonged to the migrants... They began to extract profit, instead of yield from the land. They called them commercial crops. Paddy fields began to dwindle. When our lands were encroached upon and the fields became scarce, we had to look for other kind of jobs. There were agitations to get an increase of fifty paise or even one rupee in wages. (30)

These migrants have not only changed their traditional ways of cultivation, but also turned agriculture into a mere commerce. As Shiva remarks:

The more the powerful gained economic and political power from the growing market economy, the more they dispossessed the poor and enclosed their common property. And the more the poor were dispossessed of their means to provide their own sustenance, the more they had to turn to the market to buy what they had formerly produced themselves. (20-21)

Whenever the tribal people clear the woods, burn the undergrowth and converted the earth into cultivable lands, the Jennis and the migrants acquire the fields by giving arrack or small amount to the tribal men. The irony is that they work in the same fields as landless labourers, grow crops for the landlords at a mere “wage that could not even keep hunger away” (*Mother Forest* 32). As a result, they have started buying everything from the shops. Janu remarks:



Ration cards, electoral rolls, and numbers for the huts came into being. We started buying mulagu, thuvara and payar from the shops. Become indebted to the shopkeepers. More needs meant more money. We now had to buy medicines for fever. Injections and prescription slips came into existence. Our children studied up to the fourth or fifth and began to hate the forests and the earth. We didn't get wages for work done, we led agitations. The jemni and the Party men postponed settlement indefinitely. But if the agitations continued much longer we would die of hunger. We couldn't go to the forests either. (32-33)

Thus, the growing market economy, which has enclosed the common property and dispossessed the tribes of their sustaining resources to accumulate wealth, shifts the status of the tribes from self-sustaining members to ecological refugees.

Apart from the jenmis and migrants, the rotten democracy and the corrupt politicians who should protect the rights of the tribals have violated them and contributed to their impoverishment. As Shiva comments, "In Third World countries the transformation of natural resources into commodities has been largely mediated by the state. Though couched in the language of advancing the collective public interest, the state is often a powerful instrument for the privatization of resources" (30). The political parties do no good to the tribal people and merely use them as vote bank to win the elections. They are largely responsible for the creation of unwed mothers who give birth to babies of party men. Whenever there is some agitation or protest, the parties pretend to take their side, but the final decisions favour the landlords. Janu and her people have started realising that the party men would do nothing for the welfare of the tribal people as they lust after power and money. She reports:

The fact that we could no more collect even fallen twigs from the forest, the fact that tree after tree was cut down and transported in lorries down the mountains, that our huts had walls that could crumble any moment, that we could not thatch our fallen roofs, that we had to squat in front of the Panchayat officers demanding drinking water, that our indigenous medicine and occult customs became calendar pictures printed on newspapers-all this we



knew by being within the Party. We knew that all this happened with the Party's mute support and because of its greed for power. (*Mother Forest 38*)

Their victimization has reached its climax when the migrants and other rich landlords have started encroaching their burial grounds. As a consequence, they have no place left to bury the dead. Nearly 60 people have squatted in front of the police station under Janu's leadership and insisted that they would not leave the place unless the burial grounds return to them. The encroacher gets the support of the party. Whenever the party handles these kinds of issues related to the tribals, it often ends up against them as the party men take the side of money and power. Added to this, it is the time of election in the local co-operative bank. Since the vote of the encroacher is decisive in the election, the party attempts to settle the encroachment issue in his favour. Janu understands that she could do nothing for her people by remaining in the party for it uses the landless labourers as ingredients for the party song and decoration for their speech. She comments:

From great heights, they sometimes announced free rations of a kilo of rice. And declared subsidies that we could not understand in times of starvation. ... Made men and women lazy by telling them that their time was coming. They started creating folk arts academies and research papers saying that our traditions, medicine, our way of dressing and drumming on the *thudi* were all under threat of extinction. (*Mother Forest 40*)

The increasing land acquisition has led to the growth of the number of people who have become landless and homeless labourers. The tribals have lost their lands for various reasons. Many of them have lost their lands just because they couldn't prove their ownership as most of them possess no proper records or documents of the lands. Others have transferred their lands for the debts and the rest for toddy and arrack. The means through which the tribals are evicted from their lands may differ, but the ultimate goal behind them is one and the same that is the eviction of the tribals for the development of the country which merely benefits the elite class.

As a result of the absolute displacement and deprivation of lands and livelihoods, the tribal people, under the guidance of C.K. Janu, encroach the lands in Thirunelli. It is a small hilly region of about eighteen acres which has been taken away from their ancestors long back. Forty-five landless and homeless families including Paniyars, Adiyars and Kurichyars have occupied illegally



and settled in this region. The forest guards and police force beat them up badly to drive them away from the lands. However, they remain in the hilly region as they have no place to go. Since they refuse to leave the place, a lawsuit has been filed against them and the land becomes disputed land.

She reports:

Because this is disputed land we cannot demand drinking water. We cannot get electricity also though a transmission line passes by. And because the houses do not have numbers, we cannot get ration cards either. And we cannot apply for anything. Because Party people don't get our votes, our names are also not there in the voter's lists. (*Mother Forest 42*)

The party men have turned against the encroachers as the encroached land belongs to a rich person in Karnataka who is very close to the party. As a consequence, the party men have created a difficult situation for the tribal people by not providing them with any work. Even the shops downhill refuse to give them the groceries. Although she finds it hard to hold her people together in such a difficult situation, she manages to convince them to face the dreadful situation with hope.

She remarks:

Landed people may not call us for work for some time, but not forever because those with land cannot work on it. Our people have to do all jobs related to earth, land, mud and slush so they started calling us again for work, for clearing the woods, watering the fields, transplanting paddy, manuring coffee and digging up the ground with spades and such. (43)

Realising the fact that she could not improve the status of her people through party work, she has decided to unite her people to voice their miseries and left the party in 1991. She formed the Aadivaasi Vikasana Pravarthaka Samiti (Organisation for Tribal Development Workers) in 1992. The main aim of this organisation is the reclamation of tribal lands. From then onwards, she has led many agitations and protests to restore their lost lands by encroaching upon them.

Later, in 1994, she has gathered nearly 300 landless and homeless families and occupied lands in Appootti near Mananthavaadi. They build huts and stay there. After a while, they are severely beaten up by the forest guards. Many are terribly injured. She has been hospitalized for nearly 20 days. Others have been evicted from the place. However, they continue to encroach upon



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lands in Vellamunda, Chiniyeru, and Kundara in Munnar. In all these issues, they have been terribly beaten up and severely tortured by both the leftist and rightist governments with the police force. However, the government with its police force has failed in its attempt to break the will of the tribals. Since they have no other place to go, the tribals stay back and refuse to leave the encroached lands. Janu comments, "These were not just land encroachments. They were life and death struggles for our basic right to live and die where we were born. All our struggles have been struggles to establish the ownership rights of the real owners of this land for the right to live on it" (*Mother Forest* 54-55).

In 2001, along with the landless tribals Janu has led a historical agitation by putting up huts in front of the secretariat for nearly forty days until the government sign the agreement with the tribals on 16th October 2001. In this agreement, the government promises to provide five acres of lands to the landless tribal families living in project areas like Sugandhagiri and Pookode. In other areas, the landless tribals or the tribals who possess less than one acre should be provided with agricultural lands. The distribution of the lands would begin on 1st January 2002. For a period of five years, the members of the tribal families would be provided with job opportunities. However, the government remains passive in fulfilling the promises made to the tribals. Infuriated by the government's negligent attitude, under the leadership of Janu, the tribals have encroached upon the forest lands of Muthanga in Wayanad district and settled there. On 19th Feb 2003, the police firing to evacuate the tribals has resulted in the death of a policeman and a tribal. Janu has been arrested and imprisoned on this struggle. After visiting the Muthanga Sanctuary, Arundhati Roy wrote a letter to the Kerala Chief Minister A.K. Antony, in which she comments:

The Muthanga atrocity will go down in Kerala's history as a government's attempt to decimate an extraordinary and historical struggle for justice by the poorest, most oppressed community in Kerala. It will go down in history because, unlike most 'struggles' in Kerala, it is not a petty, cynical fight between political parties jockeying for power. It is the real fight of the truly powerless against the powerful. It is the stuff of which myths are made. (*Mother Forest* 63)



On one side, the government officials, party men, rich landlords and migrants use all possible mean ways to break the symbiotic relationship between the tribals and their mother forest by forcefully evicting the indigenous people from their natural inhabitation. On the other side, “they wrote article after article lamenting the state of the environment” (49). Roy ridicules the unfair treatment of the indigenous people by the government as:

India doesn't live in her villages. India dies in her villages. India gets kicked around in her villages. India lives in her cities. India's villages live only to serve her cities. Her villagers are her citizens' vassals and for that reason must be controlled and kept alive, but only just. (70-71)

The tribals have had a unique system of living which is close to nature. They burn the undergrowth and convert the forest lands into cultivable lands. They have the practice of preserving food for future consumption. They have a unique way of predicting time and season from the chirping of birds and falling of leaves. Although their system of life does not conform to the needs of the civil society, it is complete in itself. The corrupt politician and the greedy civil society which lust after power and wealth have designed many developmental projects for the tribals that merely benefit the elite class. Janu vehemently comments:

... civil society and parties looking for power had to cook up projects apparently for our people, but actually to fulfil the needs of civil society, siphoning off all that money and transforming our people into good-for-nothings. So they transplant us to where there is no space even to stand up straight. Without drinking water or a place to relieve themselves, the image of a group of unclean people was slowly being created. (*Mother Forest* 47-48)

As discussed earlier, globalization and neoliberal policies play a crucial role in the massive displacement by development. World Bank is often willing to fund these kinds of developmental projects which displace millions from their homelands with “The merest crumbs of information” (Roy 80). In other words, it funds the developmental projects without demanding more information about the resettlement and rehabilitation (R and R) of the project affected persons. Hiding behind the phrases such as aiding hands of developing countries, the neo-colonial powers exploit the resources of the developing nations. India often repays more than what it received from the World



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Bank for its developmental projects. According to 1998 World Bank report, India paid 478 million dollars more than it received (qtd. in Roy 77).

Thus, Janu through her autobiography discloses the destructed lives of the tribal or the indigenous people. It explores not only their intimacy with nature, but also the traumatic condition encountered by them due to land alienation. It exhibits the indifferent and negligent attitude of government towards the tribals. Hence, it is evident that the developmental projects funded by the global powers which aim to produce unprecedented growth, build nation or preserve nature merely destroy and degrade the ecosystem of the developing nations, thereby depriving the tribals or the indigenous people of their homelands, familiar environment and life sustaining livelihood options.

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