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Postcolonial Development State, Appropriation of Nature, and Social Transformation of the Ousted Adivasis in the Narmada Valley, India

Sutapa Chattopadhyay*

Introduction

In contrast to the liberal ontological conceptions of nature as external from human society, critical Marxist scholars conceive of nature as an ontological reality produced through historically specific social relations for capitalist accumulation (Smith 1990, 2006, 17–21). Radical developmentalists articulate colonial modernization projects as imperial missions of civilization/native improvement and postcolonial development projects as state-led destruction legitimized by the ideology of national development (Guha 1989; Escobar 1995). That the coercive aspects of state power underlie precisely the institutions of liberal democracy lend a sardonic twist to ensuing human impoverishment. Civilization, according to eco-anarchist David Watson, is an imperial agenda for the concentration of power and all-round domination of society through massive techno-projects, which is “internalized to an unprecedented degree through mass-media and the system of consumption” (Watson 1998; Clark 2012, 515). Here, Luxemburg’s ([1913] 1963) theorization of imperialism as a primary mode of accumulation and the global spread of capitalism in noncapitalist sectors—imposed by the repressive state—is of fundamental importance. Alienation of producers from the means of production for preservation and for expropriation, ostensibly undertaken to the end of development, is brutal, regardless of the provision of any “equivalent livelihood alternatives or adequate compensation for evictees” (Neumann 2001, 308), or institutional failures to compensate for the dispossession. When traditional practices are criminalized by the imposition of new conservation regulations, or modernized agriculture, or “scientific resource management,” they change rural people’s ways of interacting with each other and their environment (Neumann 1998; Jacoby 2003). Therefore, the century-long debate on primitive accumulation, though not new, is radical and...
urgent. The redeployment of the concept openly marks renewed concerns over ever-increasing proletarianization. Primitive accumulation, defined as the “historical process of divorcing the producers from the means of production,” transforms the “social means of subsistence and of production into capital” and “immediate producers into wage laborers” (Marx [1867] 1977, 724). It includes “forcible usurpation” by enclosing common resources and separating generational and communal right-holders from their resource bases through “aggrandized modes of statist violence,” effecting a “parliamentary form of robbery” (Vasudevan, McFarlane, and Jeffrey 2008, 48).

The incisive and expert inclusion of the capital-nature dialectic by ecological Marxists, such as Paul Burkett, Barry Commoner, Joel Kovel, James O’Connor, and others, adds an ecosocial dimension into Marxist political economy. Marx himself was uncritical in his appreciation of capital-intensive technology and disregarded the environmental havoc that industrialization entails, so an authentically ecological outlook cannot be successfully gleaned from Marx’s philosophy of nature (Clark 1989). Nevertheless, Marx unreservedly supported environmentalism by opposing commodification—a process that alienates all products (fashioned by human labor working with nature) from their intrinsic worth and reduces them to a common economic matrix. In a more profound sense, Marx anticipated that class and nature would need to be seen as equally significant through his epistemological critique of capital, which depended on commodity fetishism and development with the ultimate consequences in the form of environmental destruction (see Baviskar 1995). Radical ecofeminists, such as Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (1993), have argued that historically nonhierarchical modernization projects have continuously dominated the “other” (nature, women, indigenous people, and subordinated classes) through the annihilation of traditional culture, autonomous production, and knowledge. Likewise, Ariel Salleh (2009) has extrapolated the complex interplay of biological, psychological, historical, and cultural factors to the nature of women’s work and exploitation, and the subordination of women by the dominant global economy.

Similarly, in other socially industrialized contexts (Katz 2001, 711; Bond 2004, 2006), such as the Sardar Sarovar multipurpose water project (SSP) in Western India, indigenous lives have been socially transformed through multilevel resource dispossession. Indigenous (Adivasi) common lands have been converted into plots exclusively owned by large farmers, leading to the extinction of longstanding customary communal rights to land, forests, fishing grounds, and grazing areas, creating class hierarchies between Adivasi communities and caste Hindus, and marking the violent antedate of capitalist accumulation (Blomley 2007, 2). Massimo DeAngelis’s compelling analysis of the functionality of primitive accumulation illuminates connections between colonial and present-day accumulation through the continuous enclosure of nature, shows how populations worldwide are forced to conform to “phenomenally different but substantially similar” consequences with the “separation from the means of existence” (2001, 20).
The prominence of patriarchy and fast commodification of agriculture through relocation have systematically impacted women’s productive and (re)productive tasks and spatially re-constructed gendered roles, relationships, and practices (Chattopadhyay 2009). In a similar vein, Engel-Di Mauro (2006) shows that the commodification of science, subsistence farming, and soils directly links to the segregation of women from their productive works, their political participation, and representation. Drawing from Federici (2004), who expanded on feminist scholars of the 1970s, I contend that the ontological separation of women from nature is itself an effect of social transformation; it alters the nature of work and eliminates them from their subsistence farming and resource bases, sometimes leading to a major shift of “social power” and an epistemological erasure of women’s agency (Swyngedouw 2006, 199). Plumwood’s (1993) and Warren’s (2000) analysis of the devaluation and domination of women and nature links to people–environment relations and connections across environmental-ecological issues ties into the scholarly works of radical ecofeminists (see Mies 1986; Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen, and Werlhof 1988; Shiva 1988; Merchant 1989; Mies and Shiva 1993; Agarwal 1992; Baviskar 1995; von Werlhof 2007; Salleh 2009).

Nature—from the standpoint of ecological politics—comprises and combines “nature in production,” such that has entered the human world by various modes of appropriation. This makes people’s subsistence on nature both social and ecological (Grundmann 1991; Clark 1993; Foster 1995; Kovel 2002). Intellectual tradition has given great attention to the epistemology of primitive accumulation that has shaped social relations of production, yet has devoted little time toward conceptualizing the separation of processes of production from those of social reproduction. Therefore, I build on the work of radical ecosocialists, ecofeminists, critical development theorists, as well as Adivasi protest narratives to show that primitive accumulation is not conceivable merely as the expropriation of workers, but as a process that creates hierarchies and differences along gender, “race,” and class in order to transit to capitalism through the reproduction of the capitalist wage labor relation and support for wealth accumulation. The following sections expand on (1) how the colonial and postcolonial commodification of nature and construction of large-scale water projects have led to the systematic marginalization of the Adivasis, subsequently relegating them to a reproduction of a free laboring class and (2) how this has led to a perpetuation of boundaries within the Adivasi community which challenge their autonomy and modes of survival.

**Contextualizing of Primitive Accumulation**

Lenin’s ([1899] 1960) early work on the development of capitalism in Russia conceptualized the expropriation of lands and the disappearance of peasants as imminent and “ultimately positive” for the evolution of capitalism. Although he outlined the contradictions of this process, he failed to include the evolution of conditions for peasant resistance against capitalist expansion. In turn, Samir Amin
(1974) shows that the persistent recurrence of primitive accumulation favors the colonies embedded in the modes of capitalist relations, sharpening existing disparities between the colonies (the first world and center) and the colonized (the third world and periphery).¹ In his letter to Zasulich, Marx mentions that “the ‘historical inevitability’ of a complete separation of … the producer from the means of production … is … expressly restricted to the countries of Western Europe” (Marx [1881] 1983, 124). No doubt Marx held that market forces separate labor from its modes of production, and he was thoroughly aware of the enslavement, plunder, and total annihilation of native and African cultures through colonial conquest. Nevertheless, Marx ([1867] 1977) ends Section Eight of Capital, Volume One, with a discussion on the modern theory of colonization in which he laments the failure of British colonizers to accumulate capital in their colonies, this subsequently forced them to seek the conditions necessary for accumulation by the separation of producers from their lands. He glossed over primitive accumulation as a location and time-bound process. By contrast, Luxemburg ([1913] 1963) expanded on the Western interventionist mechanisms toward the global diffusion of primitive accumulation in noncapitalist geographic locales. Perelman (2000, 31) points out the functionality of the concept of primitive accumulation by mapping the “silent compulsion of market” in continuously overexploiting labor, alienating producers, and enclosing commons. In this spirit, Harvey (2003) engages the concept to show the Statist redistribution of wealth from the lower classes to the wealthy proprietary classes and from public to private sectors. DeAngelis (2001, 67–68) posits an “ex-novo” separation in which “capital identifies new spheres of life that it may colonize with its “priorities.” This frames a capital relation that has not yet been “normalized,” and instead remains a “crystal-clear relation of expropriation” devised to enclose social spaces, commons, and protected areas.

Critical scholars have moved on from discussions on the “primitive” in the context of location, space, and time to a wide range of processes involved in the transition to and reproduction of capitalism, including the forceful disciplining of women and their bodies through the medieval European witch-hunts (Federici 2004). Nevertheless, neither this nor primitive accumulation have been uniquely Western phenomena; in the Indian Adivasi areas, for instance, witchcraft accusations have effectively been used to dispossess women, often widows, of land. Such incidents are not remnants of some traditional or superstitious past that disappeared with the forming of the nation state or through modernization/civilization projects (Sundar 2001). For instance, although Adivasi women are relatively unrestrained and democratic in their participation in all aspects of labor and the exercise of control over their earnings, they cannot inherit land nor property. Women rights-holders are linked to the patriarch—the father, husband, or even the villages—so that land stays within the confines of the extended family. In Jarkhand, witch killings are usually related to attempts by male affinities to deprive widows of their life interests, assets, or husbands’ land (Kelkar and Nanthan 1991). This treatment of women shows how

¹See also Wallerstein’s (1979) world-systems approach and theory of global circulation of capital.
nonproductive bodies are singled out as potential threats to society and subsequently disciplined, coerced, and tortured, rendering forces of domination visible. Adivasi men’s rage has been evident in the persecution of women who were forthright about reversing gender relations or who owned property (Skaria 1997); in church-trained male physicians’ efforts to eliminate female traditional healers (Eisler 1987, 140–141); and in recasting witchcraft as a fertility cult (Murray 1921). Incarcerating women brutally as witches constituted forms of disciplinary power that pervaded women’s bodies; in hindsight, this was a gender-class struggle, as women constituted a separate class within the marginalized Adivasis. Federici (2004) shows linkages between witch-hunts, colonization, and the expropriation of European peasantry for capital accrual in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She argues that primitive accumulation thrives not only on the separation of producers from production but also on the enclosure of women’s bodies, on their separation from means of subsistence and inheritance, on perpetuating difference and division, and on breaking group solidarity. Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen, and Werlhof (1988) add to this conceptualization by pinpointing the role of privatization, commodification, and enclosure of nature in prompting the severance of the proletariat from their means of subsistence by challenging their community alliances. This led to a number of broader social transformations that supported and promoted the reproduction of capitalist wage labor relations and the accumulation of capital (Glassman 2006).

James O’Connor (1988) and James McCarthy (2004, 33) note that the reproduction of capitalism crucially depends on its “conditions of production,” which include various forms of infrastructure and a labor force with particular characteristics, abilities, and environmental niches. They argue that trade agreements are mechanisms of enclosing the commons and sanctioning rights to corporations to pollute and cause ecosocial crises impacting marginalized people in given areas. This new and expanded definition of primitive accumulation is of key importance in that it attends to the ways in which neoliberal globalization breeds inequalities along lines of class, gender, and race, and also to the process that simultaneously forecloses democratic possibilities and atomizes socially excluded people by breaking their community and nature-culture bonds and by reducing their abilities to sustain alternative lifestyles or seek alternatives to development (Roberts 2008). Coronil (2002, 357) reiterates Lefebvre’s ([1974] 1991) insistence on the importance of commodification of nature (land) along with that of labor and capital, which recognizes the triad of labor, capital, and nature, and enables a thorough understanding of the processes entailed in the concentration of Europe and its colonies. The present capital relations between postcolonial and former imperial states continue to confirm that the forms of power through which metropoles and (post)colonies make and remake one another retain an imperial dimension and account for what Wolfe (2006) calls settler colonialism—the neocolonial/neoliberal present (Hart 2006). If particular roles within power structures and dynamics of dominant power discourses are not considered, then the operations of power cannot be adequately gleaned.
Wealth Accumulation, Appropriation of Nature, and the Exploitation of the Adivasis in Colonial India

If classical Marxism has shown that capitalist societies quantify social value through the exploitation of labor, ecosocialism has stressed the ecological disruption that comes with diminishing value from nature under capitalism (Kovel 2009). This latter avenue of exploitation forms an “accumulation strategy” whereby core socioeconomic relationships dramatically transform nature through fast commodification, competition, and neoliberal marketization. This is suicidal for both nature and humans. As social reproduction increasingly succumbs to capitalism and market forces, nature is reduced to a tool of the production process. Unlike traditional commodification of nature, which reaps profits from the use-value of raw materials, current commodification under green capitalism is geared to extracting exchange-value from socionatural relations (Smith 1990, 49–64, 2006, 17–22).

An “antithesis between nature and history is created” only when “the relation of man to nature is excluded from history” (Marx and Engels 1975, 55). Like Cronon’s (1983) study on colonial settlements in New England, Adivasi histories of overt or covert protests are “grounded in complex, mutually transformative linkages between social categories such as nature, culture, history, and power” (Chattopadhyay 2012, 2). They show that the colonial conceptualization of “progress” and the material paraphernalia of modernity are tangible mechanisms that subjugate Adivasis, or at best convert them from autonomous beings to objectified proletarians by deterritorializing them from their bonds with community networks, nature, and dwellings. At present, precolonial indigenous community-forest management systems exist only as narratives in imperial diaries (Agarwal 1995). They were steadily dismantled and cleared with the fast appropriation of the “feral” jungles under the colonial Forest Act of 1878. Despite official passivity, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries colonial restrictions operated over large swathes of forests and grazing areas, specifically in the Garhwal Himalayas and Uttara Kannada. Minor everyday uses of forest produce were tightly hemmed in with a progressive conversion of community forests to reserved forests (Guha 1989). In theory, forests were reserved for the purpose of tree growth conservation. In fact, the expansionist colonial state followed the “desiccationist” paradigm that replaced mixed strands of tropical forests with commercially valuable single strands of sal, deodar, and teak used to develop infrastructure, which many Western scholars overlooked (Ravi Kumar 2010, 104–105).

Adivasi retaliations countered the colonial modernization, forest management, and land resettlement policies, some of which were “merely” questionable while others were downright spurious and firmly ingrained in the imperial disciplinary practices of pitiless and inexorable expropriation. Ecological conflicts are classified as organized social activity that simultaneously halts environmental degradation and promotes sustainable use of natural resources and/or environmental restoration (Guha 1985). Guha’s (1989, 196) analysis of the autonomous, women-led Adivasi Chipko movement against commercial logging and technology-driven forest
management in the Garhwal and Kumaon Himalayas is pivotal because within the orbit of Marxist scholars, proletarian oppression has received huge attention while scarce analysis has followed on indigenous or peasant autonomy. Since the Adivasis have stayed in close proximity to nature and faced greater ecological vulnerability through colonial conservation strategies or postcolonial development programs, some radical Marxist scholars have presumed the communities retort to damaging nature in order to survive (see Harvey 1993). Adivasi uses of nature, according to my observations in the Narmada Valley, were far from sustainable, but one still cannot deny that there was an element of nature-culture reverence that persuaded them toward protecting their natural surroundings and the cattle herds on which they relied on a daily basis (see Baviskar 1995, 160–169). Chipko is symbolic of struggles against continuing accumulation and appropriation of nature, which follow a long neo-Marxist tradition of militant particularisms—what DeAngelis (2001, 17) defines as “social barriers” to accumulation.

Due to the cumulative effects of commercial forestry and bans on Adivasi hunting and gathering practices, the Chenchus of Hyderabad were forced into poverty and starvation. In desperation, the Chenchus of Kurnool took to banditry, frequently looting Hindu pilgrims (von Haimendorf 1971). Colonial foresters, meanwhile, used Kadar knowledge to gain information on marketable forest species, but the Kadars’ own use of forest produce was prohibited. Due to hunting restrictions, the populations of the Birhors in the Chotanagpur Plateau declined from 2340 to 1610 within a decade (Ehrenfels 1952). The Baigas, who believed they were the “kings of the jungles,” repudiated colonial bans and took to destructive practices to hunt animals. Micro-penalties were charged for hunting to the Reddis in order to take away their produce and enable unpaid exploitation of their labor (Bennett 1984; Chattopadhyay 2012, 65–66).

This relates to capital accumulation where the “original” or “objective conditions of living labor appear as separated, independent [verselbständigte] values opposite to living labor capacity as subjective being, which therefore appears to them only as a value of another kind (not as value, but different from them, as use value)” (Marx [1858] 1974, 461). This separation confirms the transformation of subject into object—that “the objective conditions of labor attain a subjective existence vis-à-vis living labor capacity” is fundamental to Marx’s “theory of reification” (Marx [1858] 1974, 462; DeAngelis 2001, 7). The objective condition of living labor is presupposed to have an existence independent of it, and the objectivity of the subject is distinct from the living labor capacity standing independently against it. Through “reproduction” and “realization” of the objective conditions simultaneously, the laborers’ own reproduction and the new production for expansion of the wealth of an alien subject stand against their labor capacity. Living labor, the “subjective being,” is then converted to a thing among other things (Marx [1858] 1974, 462).

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2Chenchus, Kadars, Baigas, and Birhors are all different Adivasi groups in Northern and Central India.
Vast tracts of forests that were used by the Adivasis for generations have been appropriated under the veneer of development, scientific forestry, and conservation. Tiny fractions of land were given to them. They were forced to work as day laborers in plantations for minimal or no wages, and the relationships of rural serfdom were imposed upon them with the deployment of forced sedentarization by the powerful cultivating classes. If they escaped, they were hunted down, extorted, and pushed to less plentiful areas. The barely accessible forests degraded the Adivasi proprietary conditions, which led to penury and starvation, rapidly stripping them of their honor and autonomy.

Entities that have mass and duration but are not for a subject, or self, are not objects but things. The alienation of labor is the “thingification” of objects, with a resultant impoverishment and suffering of the self. Thus the critique of political economy is internally related to the lived, suffering experience of human beings; and the enunciation of capital’s first contradiction. (Kovel 2009, 33)

Colonial surveillance techniques of appropriation created an open panopticon where the Adivasi bare lives were free yet placed under the watchful eye of the colonial or native compradors. Their “sacred” lives were neither sacrificed nor destroyed but caught in the colonial ban. This torture of the Adivasi was absolutely fundamental for the objectification of their labor and reproduction of a new indigenous workforce through the breakdown of community solidarity (Foucault 1979; Agamben 1998). Marx’s critique of the liberal understanding of primitive accumulation shows the changeover from feudalism and capitalism. The painful transition through expropriation of direct producers and destruction of individual and collective forms of property ultimately creates free laborers who have “nothing left to sell but their skins” (Marx [1867] 1977, 874).

**Wealth Accumulation through Mega Water Projects**

Throughout the world, community-based sustainable water-sharing practices and conservative water-saving techniques exist, yet ecologically and socially destructive mega-dams are increasingly sanctioned (Shiva 1988, 2002). Although dams are means to distribute and share water, large water projects conversely shift local community rights to and control over water from a public good to a centralized and/or a private good. They obliterate self-reliance, local cooperation, and endogenous indigenous development practices, and reliance on nature (DuBois 2011). At least in the short term, not all dams are profitable; large dam projects, including half of the water projects funded by the World Bank, have proved to be highly unsustainable or unprofitable in economic terms, and returned less than expected at appraisal (Dharmadhikary 1995; Ferguson 1990). “Failed” dams abound and contradictions of dam development continue to indicate that there is a development discourse at work which formulates the rules of enunciation and disciplinary procedures that determine the boundaries within which discussion occurs and excludes crucial
questions (ibid.). Technology and inundation of massive territories of ousted ethnic groups and nonethnic marginalized groups and large ecosystems make dams the most “robust” means of breaking common property regimes and completely shifting traditional communities’ generational rights to nature. This necessarily links to global capital accumulation whereby commonly used resources are trapped into corporate/state-centralized “enclosures” (DeAngelis 2004; Caffentzis 2006; Li 2008).

The historical exploitation of indigenous and nonindigenous marginalized communities through the construction of development projects have been replicated in the Global South from the Global North since the mid-20th century. Since the 1950s in India, out of millions displaced due to the construction of development projects, only 25 percent have been relocated (Parasuraman 1997). Despite the fact that Adivasis comprise only 7 percent of the total Indian population, their proportion displaced by development projects has been reported as high as 40 percent (Fernandes 1994). Guha (2010, 1) argues that, broadly speaking, Adivasis are the people who “have gained least and lost most from six decades of democracy and development in India.” They are classified in the Indian constitution as blighted by severe impoverishment, with some 52 percent of them living below the official poverty line—with the line itself questioned as conservative (World Bank Report 2011; see also Nilsen 2012). Their distinctive modes of production, relative geographic and social isolation, and cultural practices marked them as “borderline” people, very different from the mainstream populations (Whitehead 2003). Furthermore, Adivasis cannot be termed as “original settlers” if their historic marginalization, including the long trajectory of dispossession that led to their many moves, is asserted. Although their subsistence-oriented agrarian livelihoods and proximity to nature can be emphasized with reference to the dominant caste/class groups, the aspects of severe impoverishment stand on the premise that Adivasis were historically subjected to oppression3 (Xaxa 2002). Due to pervasive distress, they are currently migrating to urban centers, swelling the “impoverished informal proletariat” (Bremen 2002).

The fertile Narmada Valley is home to Adivasi Bhils, Vasavas, Ratwas, Bhilalas, Pavras, and Tadvis. Today, the Narmada River, revered as the Ganges is in the South, is punctuated by 3,165 dams, of which Sardar Sarovar is the largest (Dwivedi 1999; Figures 1 and 3). Narmada Valley protests revolve around the axis of social discontent that emerged as the pan-state struggle that articulated the contentions of dam building: the draconian measures involved in the appropriation of land under the Land Acquisition Act (1894), drafted under the Raj for ostensibly public purposes, consist in the violent “expropriation” of land through the “expulsion” of

3In contemporary India, the Narmada development project controversy is packed with a continuum of social conflicts for ecojustice from below, “perceived as the authentic legatee of an all-class and genuinely mass-based national upsurge,” which stretches back into the country’s past. Upon independence, the postcolonial development state changed its position from all-around subjugation and extortion of the poor for resource accrual to expansive development, which was instrumental for the appropriation of nature and marginalized communities’ reliance on nature by the petite bourgeoisie (Gadgil and Guha 1995, 63–64).
indigenous and non-indigenous autonomous producers from their livelihood bases without adequate notice and compensation packages. This is accompanied by the blocking of information on submersion plans and ecological damage as official secrets.

The trajectory of resistance to the Narmada Dams was popularized by an activist group called Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA). Led by middle-class urban intelligentsia, it critically engaged the subaltern agency. Narmada resistance has produced an incisive critique of India’s capitalist modernity, bearing testimony to a neglect of affected communities. In sum, the construction of the chain of dams on the Narmada does not exclusively revolve around accumulation by dispossession but rather pertains to how expanded reproduction of capital, mediated by markets, stands on the fulcrum of capitalist accumulation, and how capitalist market relations enter the conduits of social reproduction.

Adivasi Social Transformation

During the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP, Figures 1 and 2), accumulation by dispossession occurred through the expropriation and concurrent pressured proletarianization of Adivasis who labored at the dam site. At present,
facing limited livelihood opportunities, they hone capital-intensive methods to scale up productivity of cotton and groundnut mainly for cash, with limited subsistence production. Dislocation occurred in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh (MP). While dam-affected people were mainly relocated in Gujarat, the dislocated in MP received comparatively poorer compensation. Similarly, the expropriated caste Hindu farming communities now work as petty commodity producers in the Nimad region of western MP, and the consequential transformation of property rights to water has gone in favor of the dominant agricultural and industrial classes in Central Gujarat (see Figure 2 for the SSP command area4). In what follows, I exclusively analyze the everyday practices of the Tadvis in their past village—submerged at the time when I conducted my interviews, and in their currently occupied relocated village, Malwi. This analysis serves to elucidate, based on extant Adivasi narratives, the links across power, production, and social reproduction (capital-driven agriculture; limited livelihood mechanisms; and protracted everyday transformation, vulnerabilities, and contradictions due to dislocation).

The term “Tadvi” is derived from the word “tat-vi”—“tat” meaning riverbank. Tadvis were originally Bhils, and legends map their trajectories of painful dislocation to the banks of Narmada River. They are classified as Dhankas and Tetariyas, both

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4Nearly all mega-dam command area development programs are operational. A command area is the area that receives benefits such as irrigation, electricity, etc., from the hydro project.
groups claiming to be caste Hindus with Rajput origins. I was exposed to a more popular classification of Bhagats and non-Bhagats; Bhagats literally mean “devotees”. Hinduization of the Adivasis started along with religious reform movements in the 18th century (Das 1982). They joined Hindu sects, worshipped gods from the Hindu pantheon, established ties with Hindu urbanites, renounced traditional tribal practices for Hindu rituals, and maintained a vegetarian diet. Alternatively, non-Bhagats were placed below the social and economic hierarchy, ostracized from cultural events, and despised for their continued practice of animism and nonvegetarian diet, among other traditional practices. Prejudices along binaries such as pure and impure, clean and unclean, as well as Hindu bigotries, have entered into Adivasi recognition. This religious conversion connects to the systematic subjugation of Adivasis that trickled down through norms, regulations, and institutions imposed by different powerful groups, including rulers, monarchs, and colonial and postcolonial elites, who now pit Bhagats against non-Bhagats. The submerged villages were located far from cities. Following relocation, Adivasis are now closer to markets and urban centers. Traditionally, Adivasis had isolated themselves from Hinduization, but after relocation, they began to practice tribal rituals with incense sticks like caste Hindus. Unusual syncretism makes it impossible to distinguish them from caste Hindus (Lobo 2002; Xaxa 2000).

To return to the narratives on Tadvi past and present villages, according to the Tadvis, the submerged village of Gambodi had a population of 1,500, consisting of 250 Tadvi households situated in the Nandod Taluka, Vadodara District, in

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Baviskar (2005) explains the vicious construction of a power-knowledge dichotomy by the Hindu fundamentalist political party, BJP, which is not ostensibly combating Adivasi exclusion by Hinduizing them, but building a reserve of marginalized tribes to meet their political ends of cleansing other religious minorities. The Hindutva ideology very prominently informs the production of a particular discourse on Hinduism, generating a specific kind of knowledge and showing that knowledge cannot be presupposed or constituted without power (Foucault 1979).
Gujarat. Steep slopes and occasional monadnocks divided Gambodi into two broad settlement clusters: *Upla* (upper) and *Nichla* (lower). Each cluster consisted of roughly 10 houses. By the 1980s, the number of settlements had increased to 200 households, mainly due to the nucleation of extended families that led to a distribution of smaller clusters dispersed across the village (Das 1982). On the other hand, Malwi, the relocated village resembles the constructed, planned, or organized and commodified space of suburban neighborhoods. The neatness of Malwi contrasts with the sparseness of Gambodi. In Gambodi, house structures differed from one another, as did the land-use patterns, both marked by a careless yet pristine casualness. Malwi is situated in the Daboi Taluka, Vadodara District, Gujarat, where 80 households were relocated.

Many families from Gambodi were resettled in different villages, as the entire village could not be relocated in Malwi. This led to the breakdown of the village network and separation from family and friends. Malwi consists of many small settlement clusters with four to five houses in each cluster, separated by dirt roads. The village is connected with a tarred road on which buses and different kinds of conveyance trundle all day to towns and cities. (RamBhai Tadvi, Malwi male respondent, 4 years old, May 4, 2004)

Upon relocation, Malwi villagers were offered a site where houses had already been constructed, but it was readily abandoned on account of the rigidity in the management of house space (room sizes, open spaces, and proximity to other amenities). The relocated villagers preferred to construct their own houses, with rooms arranged according to need, and house sizes and appearances differing as per individual income and savings. For the most part, single women’s households were poorly constructed. Most of them had difficulty in establishing connections with the market. Extended households with many siblings performed better economically. Regardless, the villagers’ social resources, networks, and connections tend to be socially and spatially limited in Malwi. In the absence of communally held resources, informal rules of sharing in the village are difficult to sustain, resulting in the proletarization of Tadvi social capital (Das 2004).

In Gambodi, Tadvi economic well being depended on forest products, cattle, and cultivated crops. Different varieties of cultivated food crops included *jowar* (sorghum bicolor), *bajri* (pennisetum typhoides), *gahum* (wheat), *makhai* (maize), *dangar* (inferior rice), and cash crops like *kapas* (cotton) and *makfali* (groundnut). The two pulses commonly grown were *tuvar* (arhar) and *urad* (phaseolus mungo). The acreage dedicated to cotton and groundnut was low. According to the villagers, growing cotton was expensive and yielded unpredictable returns. Only a few wealthy farmers with large holdings devoted some land to cotton cultivation. They also grew different kinds of vegetables like *divela*, *arinda*, *badri*, *bhinda* (abelmoschus esculentus), *bunti* (echinochoila crus), *chowli* (vigna unguiculata), *kodra* (paspalum scrobiculatum), and *dhudi* (water gourd) in the forest edge areas. Forest products

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6A map could not be provided for the location of the villages; this could violate the respondents’ anonymity.
included berries, roots, tubers, and leaves. A variety of leaves (timbru ka pan, asitra, gundar, kanka pan, sag ka pan, and achidraka pan) were used for making plates, house roofs, roof frames, fences, and as medicinal herbs (see Hakim 1996). The villagers rolled one type of leaf to make local cigarettes called bidi. Some leaves (like betel) were chewed, and some other leaves were used to add flavor to cooked food. Different kinds of trees like bamboo and mahuda were grown for making houses, fences, and roof frames. Tadvi villagers often talked about mahuda (bassia latifolia), a large deciduous tree that flowered in early and late spring, and when it blossomed it became devoid of its leaves. The bark was pressed for highly prized oil and the dhooli (flower) was eaten raw, cooked, or fermented into a local alcohol. Other forest products were honey and grass.

The villagers earned some cash from forest produce on a daily basis. Some bartered palm liquor and other products for grains, clothes, medicines, salt, and oil. Their dependence on cash was limited, except for medicines and clothes. They owned large herds of goats, cows, and buffalos, as well as countless hens, which were tended and sold by women if they needed money for household expenses or for immediate expenditures. Cattle were their primary source of wealth. Sudden relocation reduced their access to grazing areas and fodder and thus entailed loss of income from the cattle. Tadvi women complained of cattle deaths, which in Malwi resulted from the animals’ consumption of ganda bawal, literally wild or mad Acacia, scientifically known as prosopis juliflora.7

Presently, in the absence of the diverse livelihood mechanisms of their former villages, all Tadvis practice the cultivation of cash crops and intensely rely on pesticides, fertilizers, and high-yielding, rain-fed crop varieties and farm machinery for increasing profits. According to Lyla Mehta (2001, 2007), over the last five decades devegetation has certainly taken place as a result of an increase in commercial logging which, due to the lack of institutional restrictions, has had serious repercussions on the vegetal cover of the entire region (Kutch, Gujarat, and Saurastra). Many of these factors have contributed to a decline in the groundwater table, degradation of soil, and deterioration in farmers’ health. Tadvi villagers are cutting down existing shrubs and bushes for firewood and almost every open space is used for cultivating crops for capital or subsistence. Devegetation and the severity of the drought are now being felt more acutely by the villagers along with the environmentalists (Murishwar and Fernandes 1988). Tadvi dietary patterns have shifted with changes in environment, landscape, choice of crops produced, and lack of access to commonly used resources. The Malwi villagers need a stable income for agricultural and household expenses. Villagers who are inexpert in using modern farming methods or do not have the capital to invest in farming are falling behind those who are able to obtain higher yielding crop varieties. Those who received

7The plant neither attracts rain nor gives moisture to the soil but conserves water within its system; it undermines biodiversity as livestock cannot ruminate its pods, resulting in loss of appetite, paralysis, and even death (Mehta 2001).
infertile and uneven lands are also adversely impacted. Furthermore, abnormal monsoons, pest attacks, and repeated crop failures for various reasons, make conditions for some deplorable.

We mull over the variety of vegetables and edible leaves they used to get from the forests in Gambodi. Some food and cash crops are grown in Malwi but larger quantities are saved for sale, the major emphasis being on achieving higher productivity for cash crops (cotton and groundnut). We are now constricted to a very “specific occupational niche.” (GovindBhai Tadvi, Malwi male respondent, 33, July 23, 2004)

Under conditions of increasing commodification of the peasant economy, the household is not a simple conglomerate of individuals securing a livelihood from the same subsistence and commodity base. Rather, members of a household undertake various gender-specific activities and production, ranging from subsistence cultivation to migratory wage labor, and almost every Tadvi household has a member working in the city to cope with survival-related precarity. Every failure in reaching the target productivity translates to borrowing monies with high interest rates from money-lenders or larger farmers for seeds, pesticides, and fertilizers. Many indebted farmers labor on the land of larger farmers to repay loans.

In Malwi, the economic freedom of Tadvi women has rapidly diminished. Their labor circles around the home and tending vegetables in house plots for consumption; their limited cattle do not help to bring in extra cash. Women do not plough lands or drive tractors or fit pumps for irrigation. Instead, they weed farms, plant seeds, and harvest crops with their male counterparts. In one case, I found a mother-in-law engaged in plowing, planting, and harvesting along with her husband and sons, while her daughter-in-law (like other women in the village) reared cattle and performed domestic chores (Chattopadhyay 2009). Many single women farmers have lost land to moneylenders due to their inability to pay back loans. Some of them were unable to make connections with the markets, including through speculation, and gradually entered into considerable debts.

In agreement with Federici ([1974] 2012a; [1974] 2012b), I argue that the transition to capitalism redefines gendered productive and re-productive chores, socially constructed gender roles, and spatial divisions of labor, and transforming one’s social position. Pertinently, Federici fleshes out the social and historic conditions under which gendered bodies were subsumed under patriarchy and capitalism, which is central to defining the constitution of femininity. She concludes that,

enclosures expropriated the peasantry from communal land … which were thus “liberated” from any impediment preventing them to function as machines for the production of labor. (Federici 2004, 184; also see Dalla Costa and James 1972; Mies 1986; Bakker 2007, 545)
The resource users have been detached from their ties with nature and transplanted into a new, market (capital-dependent) economy. Today, Tadvis have little or no control over their lives because the transition from community-based subsistence practices to capitalist market-oriented activities has opened up for them a sorry fate of real-life subordination and incorporation of labor to capital.

Primitive accumulation through dams opens a transnational dimension that attacks local survival, livelihood, and social relations. The continuing process of wealth accumulation and appropriation of nature is not singular to the capitalist-state or multi-lateral agencies, but it does lead to the social transformation of people such as the Tadvis (who were occupying the primary economic sector) into free labor classes. As they became alienated from their production bases, customs, traditions, knowledge, and skills, their productive activities were severed from those of social reproduction. This has led to a total domination of their labor, bodies, and minds by capitalist imperatives (von Werlhof 2007).

References


