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A BRIEF ENGAGEMENT WITH THE IDEA OF INDIGENEITY

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Abstract

Indigeneity is a complex concept to explain. This paper tries to move through some trajectories involved in the discourses surrounding the category. In a world hegemonised by capitalist institutions and western perspective, indigeneity has for long been understood in terms of alterity or the 'other'. In the last couple of decades, however, newer discourses have begun to emerge exploring the meaning of the category. It is being broadly understood as (though not limited to) original inhabitants of a place or people inhabiting a place prior to colonisation. The agency of the indigenous people themselves have been now identified as primary in any acceptable discourse. The role of international agencies like the UN is important here. Understanding these complex categories requires going beyond capitaocentrism and accepting the essential diversities and multiplicities of the people's identities.

KeyWotds : *Indigeneity Colonisation, United Nations, Capitalist Institution, Indigenous People*

Introduction

Indigeneity essentially is a function of cultural membership and relation to land. Both of these markers of identity have come into crisis with expanding capitalist forces. Indigenous peoples all over the world have faced the onslaught of imperialist expansion and capitalist assimilation at different stages of history. With colonial expansion, Europe began controlling distant lands thus leading to centuries of exploitation of resources and peoples of these lands. Colonialism was fought against from time to time and receded, only to emerge in newer forms.

Colonisation involved economic, political and cultural subjugation of whole communities. It not only took away resources but also the power of people to understand themselves and comprehend the world. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) writes about the deep rooted alienation that colonialism brought to the colonised when they were robbed of their own perspectives, knowledge systems, and universe of meanings and symbols. "It appalls us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own cultures and own nations. It angers us when practices linked to the last century and centuries before that, are still employed to deny the validity of indigenous peoples' claim to existence, to land and territories, to the right of self-determination, to the survival of our languages and forms of cultural knowledge, to our natural resources and systems of living within our environment" (Smith 1999: 1).

We can identify two phases of evolution of the nation-state system under capitalist expansion. The colonial nation-state was very much an ally of the capitalist forces. In the post colonial era, this system changes. The post colonial nation-state in many cases, acquired relative autonomy vis a vis global capital in the first few decades of independence. India was one such instance. However, under the neoliberal regimes of the late 20thand early 21st centuries, the status of the nation-state remains ambiguous. On the one hand, it has retreated from welfare functions, and on the other hand, has become more interventionist in favour of global capital.

In this phase, it retains much of its power and authority vis a vis the indigenous peoples and in fact, expands upon it.

But the old indigenous world dies hard; it still keeps struggling against the incursions of the modern state that cannot thrive without dismantling the traditional social and human relations rooted in the old and natural pattern of life and economy. Looking beyond the restrictive lenses of class struggle and capitalist production, and liberal rights and individuality, helps us look into these collectivities in new light and understand social relations and deprivation in a new conceptual framework. This paper is divided into two sections. The first engages with the major indigeneity debates that have emerged theoretically. The second is a brief description of these debates as they have emerged in the international forums especially the United Nations (UN).

Exploring the Category of Indigenous People

Indigeneity is a complex phenomenon or category. It has been described, defined and explained in many ways, underscoring the diversity, contestability and non-fixity of the term indigenous. The UN has become the central stage for the debates regarding indigeneity, especially since the closing decades of the twentieth century. In a general sense, indigeneity is associated with the idea of belongingness or situatedness in a certain place implying original (or prior) inhabitance, and connotes subsequent displacement, dispossession and marginalisation. "It (indigeneity) connotes belonging and originariness and deeply felt processes of attachment and identification, and thus it distinguishes "natives" from others. Indigeneity as it has expanded in its meaning to define an international category is taken to refer to peoples who have great moral claims on nation-states and on international society, often because of inhumane, unequal, and exclusionary treatment" (Merlan 2009: 304). Merlin identifies two dominant discourses that have emerged in defining the concept of indigeneity: criterial and relational. Criterial definitions describe indigeneity on the basis of a group's own characteristic experiences and identities. Though it may have relational aspects like being prior to etc, its main thrust lies upon a peoples' internal attributes. The definitions adopted by the United Nations

(UN), best reflected in Martinez Cobo's reports, and those emphasised by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), fall into this category (UN conventions and developments will be dealt with in more detail in the following section). The relational aspect of indigeneity, on the other hand, highlights indigeneity as a form of identity that gets formulated and shaped as a result of a group's associations and engagements with others. Merlin (2009) writes that this can be found to be exemplified by David Maybury-Lewis's (1997) statement that "indigenous peoples are defined as much by their relations with the state as by any intrinsic characteristics that they may possess" (Merlan 2009: 305). Dyck (1985), De la cadenza and Starn (2007) argue in the same vein.

Karlsson and Subba (2006) argue that indigeneity can be understood on three primary grounds. The first is in the sense of being 'original inhabitants'. European colonialism as well as waves of migration have tended to pose serious threat, on certain occasions, to the people who have been natives to a particular place. Here again, it must be stated that, given the experiences of colonial domination of the larger part of the world's population and in the wake of the evolving scholarship and the formative discourses at the UN, the idea of being 'original inhabitants' has also come to be understood as 'prior inhabitants', meaning, prior to any colonial occupation. Stavenhagen and Gray are leading proponents of this perspective. A second understanding of indigeneity is based on structural aspects. Largely inspired by the discussions at the ILO and the UN and the studies and reports compiled by Cobo, it stresses on the 'non-dominant' nature of the indigenous communities. "Indigenous people are non-dominant people with a culture different from that of the majority" (Karlsson and Subba 2006: 6). Apart from these two perspectives, a third one looks at indigeneity from the angle of self-identification. Burger (1990) stresses that, as very strongly put forward by indigenous peoples themselves, it is the indigenous communities who should have the right and authority to define indigeneity and to decide who should be considered indigenous. To take away the agency of the indigenous peoples to define, organise and voice their concerns is to rob them off of those very rights and dignity for which the indigeneity movement had originated. "To say, as some critics do, that the indigenous issue has grown merely out of patronage and promotion by the

international agencies like the International Labour Organisation, world Bank, and the United Nations is to ignore the history of the indigenous peoples' struggle all over the world" (Karlsson and Subba 2006: 7). Indigeneity is a contentious issue. Given the wide variations in the histories, experiences, nature and associations of indigenous communities, it is only understandable, to some extent healthy, for such an idea to be treated as open-ended and conceptually constitutive.

Indigeneity has been approached differently by different states. Whereas some states have openly welcomed the indigeneity category, others like India have questioned the applicability of the concept in its context. Scholars like B. K. Roy Burman, Sumit Guha, Andre Bateille have been sceptical about the applicability and adaptability of the concept in India. Karlsson (2006) writes that their whole dismissal of the term rests on the idea that the discourses on the indigenous peoples have been imposed on India by the West. Others like Virginius Xaxa, Damodaran, Subba, Karlsson have been more positive in tis regard. One of the central loci in the indigeneity debate in India has been associated with the concept of self-determination. The fragile political condition in which India gained its independence, and the massive ethnic, lingual, religious, cultural diversities that have been weighing heavily on its 'nation-building' agenda ever since, have made the debates of self-determination uncomfortable and unsolicited. That indigeneity is closely associated with self-determination has made it even more unappealing and ill-favoured.

Beteille (2006) states that the generally used term or category in India for the indigenous peoples is 'tribe'. Whereas the latter underscores the distinctiveness, isolatedness or backwardness of a community, the former focuses on 'rights and empowerment'. He argues that India makes a complicated case for indigeneity and requires detailed social and historical study. The differences among different indigenous groups across the world are too large to forego serious historical details. But the traditional association of these communities, he writes, with land and forests, and their gradual alienation, however, mark their striking commonality.

> "The idea of indigenous people is tied inextricably to ideas relating to land, soil and territory. The force of those ideas cannot be appreciated

> without taking into account of conquest, spoliation and usurpation. The claims of the weak have been violated repeatedly by the strong, dramatically in some cases and insidiously in others. But a distinctions to be made the claims of land of an individual or a family and the claims to soil and territory of a whole community or an aggregate of communities" (Beteille 2006: 29).

Karlsson (2006), on the other hand, carries a more favourable outlook towards the whole indigeneity debate. The rapidly growing activism of the indigenous peoples and their efforts to come together in order to address the historical injustices, if nothing else, points towards the relevance and undeniable resonance of the indigeneity concept.

The increasing representation of the indigenous peoples from India in the Working Group for Indigenous Peoples (WGIP) at Geneva, Karlsson further argues, reflects the anxiety and fears on the one hand and the urge to voice their own opinion on the other. In his study of the the statements and interventions of the participants at the WGIP, he notes remarkable activism of the representatives of the indigenous communities from the India's north-east. In general, these exchanges and meetings denote a commonly held understanding that indigeneity can mean different things (and hence definitions are mostly open-ended), and a will to connect through their common experiences and injustices 'translated into a new language that emphasise a common indigenous predicament' (Karlsson 2006: 54). Equating indigenous identity and movement with self-determination (for independent statehood) is politically as well as conceptually incorrect, and by doing so, the Martinez Report of 1999, that is being discussed below, 'misrepresents the aspirations of most indigenous peoples' and their struggle to 'make states more inclusive and democratic' (ibid: 64). He instantiates the indigenous struggles of the North-East where 'extensive ethnic complexities' characterise its society and politics. To understand what these communities drive for (barring few exceptions like the Nagas), we must go 'beyond the imaginary of the territorial nation' (ibid: 68). One Tripuri representative explained the threats that the indigenous peoples in Tripura have been facing, in the 2002 session: "The Tripura kingdom's merger

with India in 1949 opened the area for large-scale immigration from neighbouring East Pakistan (later Bangladesh), and the indigenous Borok people as a result have become 'refugees in their own country' (ibid: 59). These threats, for the indigenous peoples, are real. But they do not automatically translate into a demand for separate statehood. Doing so, and through that not engaging with their claims of indigeneity, only causes further alienation and exclusion of these communities. This also robs them of their own agency in a representative democratic platform and reduces them to, as Amita Baviskar puts it, notions of 'adivasi-as-victim' or 'adivasi-as-exotic other' (Baviskar 2006: 41). The importance of reinstating the agency of the indigenous peoples in reclaiming their own history and in constructing their own discourses must be taken up with utmost urgency, and this, what Dipesh Chakravarty argues. will 'bring aboriginals into the mainstream narratives of the nation by portraying them as active agents of history' (Chakravarty 2006: 242).

The discourse of indigeneity acquires even more gravity in the context of the modern political-economic system. Nathan and Xaxa (2006) argue that in India, aboriginal or tribal people and their 'deprivations' have been generally explained in terms of their exclusion or distance from the 'modern' economy. This would mean that their 'inclusion or incorporation in to the market-based or capitalist economy and society' would make things 'fine' (Nathan and Xaxa 2012: 3). In India, they argue, two different discourses on aboriginal people have developed. One discourse, best represented in G. S. Ghurye (1963), explains the 'comparative backwardness of the tribes' in terms of 'their comparative distance and isolation from the larger Hindu society' (Xaxa 2012: 23). Such an understanding not only confirms and legitimises the hierarchies as well as dominance of the Hindu society, but mitigates the essential diversity, indigeneity and autonomy of the tribes of India. The second discourse, as Varrier Elwin (1944) would argue, explains that 'the backwardness and deplorability of the tribal society was owed to their contact with the outside world, which had led them to become increasingly indebted and to lose control over their land and forests' (ibid). Since, after independence, the emerging national leadership explicitly was convinced of the first discourse and attributed the economic deprivations of the indigenous communities to their

isolation, Xaxa argues that the entire stimuli of the tribal policies after independence were put forward to bringing an end to such isolation and integrating them with the larger Indian (Hindu) society. The use of this very nomenclature of 'tribe' instead of indigenous people, he further argues, represents this line of thought. It tends to accrue the economic poverty and related aspects like poor health and education to the tribal communities themselves and their internal social structures. The category of 'indigenous peoples', on the other hand, 'focuses the overall discourse not on the large issue of colonisation and expropriation of tribal lands, forests and other resources' (ibid: 29). Explaining the indigenous communities' status in the modern post-colonial state in terms of their isolation and autonomy shall only create a self-other dichotomy in place of a more heterogenous multi-cultural understanding of society. This shall delegitimise the claims of these communities over their lands and resources, and weaken their struggles for autonomous existence even within the overarching state and its constitutional safeguards. Selma Sonntag (2006) asserts the primacy of the Constituent Assembly debates in the social-structuring of post-colonial India. The Fifth and the Sixth Schedules together define the tribal (indigenous) communities' status and rights within the Constitution. However, she argues that "it was the Sixth Schedule, in opposition to the Fifth Schedule, the reified the exotic as authentic — providing a cultural justification for self-government. The two constitutional schedules imparted an implicit gradation of indigenous peoples along a continuum of authenticity" (Sonntag 2006: 191). Such a reading of the constitutional provisions ensuring the rights of the indigenous communities undermines the (essential) intrinsic differences and of the social structures of these communities and their active will to maintain and sustain these practices. The Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, that grants autonomous districts to two communities of Assam, Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao (now three with BTAD), is meant to preserve the essential uniqueness, indigeneity, and traditional nature of the socio-economic practices of these communities as well as their rights over their lands and resources. Reading this as gradation of the 'exotic' will only further the discourse that attributes the deprivations of the indigenous to their isolation from the 'Indian society'. This further reaffirms the 'self' (the Hindu Indian society) and the 'other' (the exotic/victim indigenous communities)

dichotomies. The Sixth Schedule shall be taken up in more detail in a later chapter. But to quickly just assert here, it must not be read as a medium or a measure of 'authenticity', but must be considered as an attempt to preserve the primary attributes of a community that describes itself as different from the rest of the society (and therefore fear marginalisation) and securing their basic rights as a group over their land and resources owing to their indigeneity which are just demands in a democratic polity. Having had a general discussion on the category pf indigenous peoples, we also must juxtapose it against the larger dominant socio-economic forces of capitalist production, global market, and development discourse.

Indigeneity Debates at the United Nations

A major part of the debates on indigeneity has taken place in various forums of the United Nations (UN). The first international involvement regarding the engagement of the indigenous issues was attempted at a time when the League of Nations was still in a functional state. When the League was formed, the issues of indigeneity hardly featured anywhere near the prominent agenda. It was however approached in 1923, by Deskaheh, a Haundenosaunee chief, to speak and 'defend the right of his people to live under their own laws, on their own land and under their own faith' (as mentioned in the UN website for indigenous people). Though he did not get a chance to speak there, his efforts marked one of the foremost attempts to take indigenous issues to an international forum. Almost at the same time, a Maori religious leader named T. W. Ratana, in his protest against breaking of the Treaty of Waitangi between the Maoris of New Zealand and the British, travelled first to London and then Geneva (the League headquarters) to speak against the injustices done to the indigenous people. He was denied any opportunity to speak. These attempts, however, brought the indigenous issue to international platform.

When the UN was established in 1945, the initial years saw its exclusive and undivided attention channeled towards international security and peace-keeping. Gradually the scope of its activities got broadened. The agenda of indigenous peoples, however, remained outside its debates for a long time, primarily because of the ambiguities related to the concept of indigeneity. It was the Martínez Cobo

Study of 1981 that made one of the first comprehensive attempts to put together a nuanced and exhaustive conceptualisation of the category of indigeneity.

The Martínez Cobo Study states in detail the actions and initiatives taken towards protection of indigenous peoples' interests at various forums within as well as outside of the UN. The most notable of them can be found at different conventions of ILO at different points in time. ILO had carried out studies on indigenous workers early as 1921. In May 1926, a Committee of Experts on Native Labour was set up by the ILO Governing Body which led to, among others, adoption of a number of recommendations towards aboriginal people. The study notes that, "the International Labour Conference, in article 2(b) of the Recruiting of Indigenous Workers Convention 1936 (No.50), defined "indigenous workers" as "workers belonging to or assimilated to the indigenous populations of the dependent territories of Members of the Organisation and workers belonging to or assimilated to the dependent indigenous populations of the home territories of the Members of the Organisation" (Cobo 1981: 10). Subsequent conventions tried to incorporate more and more such communities within its forms. Since the Philadelphia Conference of 1944, the ILO has been working in various ways to fight the 'social problems of the indigenous populations of the world'. A Committee of Experts on Indigenous Labour was formed which first met in Bolivia in January 1951 and came up with a series of recommendations, one of which was working in closer association with the UN. The Panel of Consultants on Indigenous and Tribal Populations and a Technical Meeting on Problems of Nomadism and Sedentarisation were also organised by the ILO between 1962 and 1967. The conventions led to some important deliberations on the indigenous peoples' situations. Parts from the ILO, other UN agencies like Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), World Health Organisation (WHO), Andean Indian Programme (AIP), and Organisation of American States (OAS) also have made attempts at deliberations in the interests of the indigenous communities all across the world.

The Chapter 5 of the Cobo Study deals in detail with the definitional aspects of the term indigenous. It mentions at the very beginning about the difficulties

associated with defining such a complex term with varied notions. It, nonetheless, is very essential to state outrightly that, as Cobo explains, the agency of the indigenous peoples themselves must be given supreme consideration in developing any idea surrounding the category. The World Council of Indigenous Peoples had developed the following as a working definition of indigeneity: "The World Council of Indigenous Peoples declares that indigenous peoples are such population groups as we are, who from old-age time have inhabited the lands where we live, who are aware of having a character of our own, with social traditions and means of expression that are linked to the country inherited from our ancestors, with a language of our own, and having certain essential and unique characteristics which confer upon us the strong conviction of belonging to a people, who have an identity in ourselves and should be thus regarded by others" (Cobo 1982: 5). Cobo then identifies certain aspects that are widely regarded across the world, albeit with variations, in defining indigeneity: Ancestry, culture, language, group consciousness, multiplicity of defining criterions, acceptance by indigenous community, residence in certain parts of the country, and legal definitions.

The ancestry factor is known to have commonly existed among all indigenous peoples, though its relative importance vary from one case to another. Ancestry is invoked here to denote a common descent rather than any 'racial' identity. Amongst the Maoris of new Zealand, for instance, common ancestry for Maori identity relies more on how people see/identify themselves as, rather than their actual Maori blood/kinship relations or descent from the ancestors. "In practice, then, the criterion established by the Maori Housing Act 1935, which included 'any person descended from a Maori' is applied for the purposes of definition of who is a Maori. The present trend is stressing self-identification as a Maori and moving away from a specific degree of Maori blood" (Cobo 1982: 13). Amongst the Métis and Inuits of Canada, Lapps of Norway, the indigenous ethnic communities of Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, French Guyana, Philippines etc, too, ancestry is an important denomination of indigeneity.

Culture has been enumerated by Cobo as the second important factor in determining indigeneity. The report states that "any group in which the so-called

'autochthonous' elements predominate to a considerable degree would be classified as 'indigenous' group (ibid: 16). The consideration of culture must include "both material and technical elements as well as those relating to behaviour and ideology" (ibid). One of the other elements in understanding culture is religion, which might be both implicitly and explicitly stated in various cultures. A second element of culture, as noted here, is the practice of a tribal system. Reference has been made of India where the term "Scheduled Tribe" is used to designate communities as indigenous. "The specification that a person must be a 'member of a tribe, a tribal community, or a part of a tribe or of a tribal community or of a group within a tribe or within a tribal community' in order to be considered 'tribal' seems to give this criterion overriding importance or determining whether a person is or is not indigenous" (ibid: 22). In Canada, indigeneity is intrinsically attached to the association of a group with its land, its land rights and a general practice of common ownership. The Canadian government in its Indian land statute 1874 mentions that "the status of Indians are members of Bands who hold in common certain reserve lands generally by virtue of written treaties, though treaties were not signed in all cases. Some of these Band members have taken up residence off reserves" (ibid: 24). However, Cobo underscores the importance of the agency of the indigenous communities themselves in defining themselves and urges not to superficially read them into a western-styled membership of community. The 1968 US Congress imposed upon the tribes, through a statute, a legal system similar to the Bill of Rights. Though might seem 'emancipatory' and progressive, it diminishes the tribes' internal juridic-political authority and includes them within the voting membership practices (and regulations), thereby leading to 'the imposition upon already-threatened tribal societies of the standards of urban America'.

Thirdly, in the contexts like Philippines, Guyana, Peru, Bangladesh etc, simply living as a member of an indigenous community can lead to be regarded as indigenous. In many of these cases, specific dress codes and attires are also considered as symbols of indigeneity. "Dress is generally considered as an aspect of group consciousness, or of self-identification of the person, group or community with the indigenous population, or of the option or choice of that person, group or

community. It is stated by their continuing decision they reflect both the indigenous culture and their attachment to it" (ibid: 29). Moreover, culture also connotes how a person or a community earns livelihood. Certain occupations have been identified in taxonomic references as indigenous, like reindeer breeding or herding in Norway and Sweden or living semi-nomadic lives in Bangladesh. In Indonesia, Paraguay, Ecuador and so on, indigeneity is understood as 'pre-modern' or backward which is contestable. Use of vernacular languages also has been commonly regarded as a cultural indicator of indigeneity. Finally, self-consciousness of a group pr an individual is paramount in defining indigeneity. This idea of group consciousness denotes that "the individual or group considers himself or itself as 'indigenous', or that the community in which the individual or group lives considers him (sic) or it 'indigenous', or alternatively that there is a combination of personal and communal considerations which make him or it 'indigenous' person or group" (ibid: 37). Having discussed on the definitions of the category of the indigenous as put forward by Martínez Cobo, below is a brief discussion on the United nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP).

The WGIP was formed in 1982 under the Economic and Social Council (Resolution 1982/34) as subsidiary to the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. It meets annually in Geneva. Consisting of independent experts as well as Sub-Commission members, the Working Group is one of the largest forums at the UN. It has initiated several dialogues for the promotion of interests of indigenous peoples and has provided a platform for various indigenous representatives to meet and exchange ideas. It has been home to, therefore, some of the most formative debates on the issue of indigeneity.

Subsequently in 1989, the ILO organised the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention. The UN General Assembly, through its Resolution A/RES/47/75 declared in 1993 the International Year of the World's Indigenous People. This was followed by the launch of the International Decade of the Indigenous Peoples (1995-2004). In July 2000, UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was established. It is an advisory body to the ECOSOC. It is a 16 member committee that has a mandate to deliberate upon indigenous issues. In 2005, the second

International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (2005-15) by the General Assembly. Five objectives were enlisted, namely, non-discrimination and inclusion, full and effective participation, redefining development policies, adopting targeted policies and programmes, and ensuring accountability. The year 2007 saw two important developments. The Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP), a subsidiary organ to the UN Human Rights Council was established. The same year, UNGA adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People on September 13th. Along with their right to equality and freedom, the Declaration also states clearly the indigenous peoples' right to self-determination and autonomy. It also states their rights against any discrimination and forced assimilation. Highlighting their relationship with their lands, Article 10 of the Declaration states that: "Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return". Articles 26 and 27 underline the indigenous peoples' rights to their lands, resources and territories that have been theirs traditionally, and that the states must give legal recognition to such customs, traditions and land tenure systems.

In 2010, the General Assembly decided on conducting a 'high level plenary meeting' for the interests of the indigenous peoples. It was called the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. The first conference was held in September (22nd and 23rd) 2014. The objective was to bring together different perspectives on indigenous peoples and discussing on the best ways to achieve their rights in view of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The UN still continues to hold active platform for debates as well as actions regarding the protection of the indigenous peoples all over the world. However, to reiterate what has been said here before, the developments at the UN in this regard must be understood merely as facilitation or initiation of world-wide discussions that will lead to an inclusive and comprehensive understanding of the indigenous issues and as extension of the struggles and strifes of the indigenous peoples everywhere. Below is a brief engagement with the overall research design of this study.

Conclusion

Indigeneity is not an easy concept to be defined. It has been understood and interpreted by different scholars at different places, differently. On a very basic and rudimentary understanding, indigeneity can be regarded as belonging to or situated at a certain place in terms of being the original inhabitants of the place. However, in a context of growing challenges in terms of increasing loss of the traditional dominance of the indigenous communities over their land and resources, the exclusiveness of such an understanding has come to be questioned. Indigeneity has now, therefore, come to denote communities with distinct customary cultural and socio-economic practices who had been inhabitants of a particular place prior to any colonial occupation. The major thrust of defining the category has started to be put on the indigenous peoples themselves. Increasing activism of these communities in the international agencies and also within their own contexts, has now made their agency in developing any discourse surrounding the category undeniable and unsurpassable.

The primary argument must be reiterated here. Understanding indigeneity in terms of alterity or 'otherness' in a capitalocentric world will forever keep the mainland societies dominant. It is only by accepting the essential diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity of the socio-economic world would we be able to begin to understand categories like indigeneity in their right.

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