

Impacting Development Thought and Practice through Bhili Cultural Rejuvenation

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Abstract

The federation of Bhil Adivasi mass organisations in Western India, the Adivasi Ekta Parishad, has over the past two decades or so developed an innovative new tool of development in the form of cultural rejuvenation. The Bhil Adivasis under the aegis of the AEP have conserved and rejuvenated their traditionally rich cultural heritage to forge a new assertive identity for themselves to help them negotiate the complex social, economic and political milieu of a modern liberal democracy and have in the process developed an alternative framework of equitable and sustainable development. This paper details this brave new world of the Bhil Adivasis of Western India.

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1. Introductory Background

A fairly well established fact today is that the institutions set up under the provisions of the Constitution of India for the protection of the adivasis have not functioned properly and the various laws and policies enacted from time to time for this purpose have not been implemented primarily due to the wrong development policies adopted by the state which have tended to strengthen rather than weaken the political and economic power of the non-adviasis vis-a-vis the adivasis. The state has also failed to provide good and adequate education services which has resulted in the adivasis remaining unequipped to negotiate the complexities of the modern centralised system of governance into which they have been forcefully integrated. The poverty induced by these wrong development policies has adversely affected the nutritional levels of the food intake of the adivasis and combined with the lack of good and cheap health services has led to a decline in their general health. Moreover the even greater lack of both education and health services for the women has meant that they have not been able to smash age old patriarchal structures and their consequent lack of reproductive rights has led to a population explosion putting further pressure on already scarce resources. All these factors have combined to produce a scenario wherein adivasis are being continually exploited by the improper functioning of the modern market system which has increasingly penetrated into their subsistence lifestyles and being forced to live on the edge. The condition of the Bhil adivasis of western Madhya Pradesh provides ample evidence of this decay.

The Bhils have not only lost their natural resource bases but with the undermining of their subsistence agriculture based lifestyle that this has led to, they have lost confidence in their own indigenous culture too. Poverty has led to community links breaking down and there has been a continuous downgrading of their culture by non-adviasis oppressors. Even their Gods are losing their shine as more and more Bhils have begun to worship Hindu or Christian Gods and Goddesses. The final blow has come in the form of dam building on the river Narmada and its tributaries which seeks to destroy completely not only the Bhils' habitat but also, by displacing them into areas populated largely by non-adviasis, their unique culture.

The Bhil adivasis have a rich oral folklore. There is the creation myth centred on the river Narmada in some cases and in others on the Goddesses and Gods Velubai, Rani Kajal and Indiraja which is sung during the Diwasa festival allowing the Bhils to partake of the products of their lands during the kharif season. Then there is the myth of the Goddess Kansari, who represents the staple cereal sorghum, which is sung at the time of the celebration of Indal which is a festival of thanksgiving to nature for having been bountiful with her harvests. Finally there is the myth of Kalorano the God of Rain which is sung to appease him when the rains play truant during the monsoon season. Apart from these major myths there are a number of other stories. Their contents reflect the close empathic relations that the Bhils have traditionally had with their habitat given the fact that their very existence is directly dependent on the munificence of nature. This rich and valuable oral literary corpus has the potential for reviving not only the belief of the Bhils in themselves and thus motivating them to better participate as equal citizens in political and economic processes but is also capable of providing theoretical and practical clues towards the formulation of a more sustainable agriculture based developmental model than the one that is dominant today. However, this valuable heritage is in danger of being lost forever as the younger Bhils today have little regard for the traditional Bhil culture and its rich oral heritage given its inability at present to secure them a viable livelihood.

2. An Innovation that is Systems Changing

Historically a major medium for the positing of a strong identity by any community has been its language. All literate cultures have thrived by developing a rich literature to strengthen their language. However, adivasi cultures being non-literate have not been able to do this and so have fallen behind and face extinction. Today the lack of entertaining written literature in the Bhili language has resulted in most literate Bhils switching over to Hindi instead. So transcribing the voluminous folklore of the Bhils and publishing it will provide the literate Bhils with enough reading materials of quality to entice them back to their mother tongue. New literature and the further development of the written Bhili language and a revival of their decaying culture will then follow as the night the day. The modern Indian languages have all developed in this way. Moreover the experience of using the traditional myths and tunes in conveying modern developmental and cultural messages has shown that they are extremely effective for this purpose. This innovation is being done by various social and political developmental organisations in the western Madhya Pradesh region which are all affiliated to the federation Adivasi Ekta Parishad (AEP) which is active in the four contiguous states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Transcription of the whole of the folklore will also allow a systematic study of it and thus offer many more opportunities for innovation. The folklore is amenable to creative interpretation and copious material in support of the theory and practice of alternative, decentralised and sustainable development can be culled from it.

There is for example the creation myth sung in the villages near the Narmada which detail how God was suddenly beset with the idea to build the universe and he looked towards Relu Kabadi the woodsman to go into the jungle and fetch him wood. Thus starts the whole story of how slowly all the animals and plants are created and finally the rivers Narmada and Tapti. These rivers finally meet up with the ocean Dudu Hamad in marriage and in the process of their journey all the various villages, hills and valleys are created. The whole song gives a sense of the vastness of nature and the strength of natural processes and inculcates a respect in the listener for these. This is in direct contrast to the hubris of modern man who has tried to subordinate nature to his own ends and given rise to the serious environmental problems that face him today. The adivasis have been sufferers of this process. Thus by popularizing their creation myth and emphasising that their worldview is much more “rational” in the present context of serious ecological degradation will go a long way towards increasing their self esteem.

Similarly, there is another story in one of the epic songs about a woman who has to answer for having questioned the authority of her husband. She is brought before the panchayat which is the traditional all male dispute resolution forum. There the panches decree that she be punished for her disobedience and order that her tongue be cut off and given to the husband to swallow. The tongue then gets stuck in the throat of the husband where it has remained ever since. This story has been picked up to depict the extent to which the Bhil society is patriarchally oppressive of women. At the same time the fact that the tongue has got stuck in the husband’s throat offers the chance to the woman to recover it and so establish her right to speak out for her needs. This is the motif that has been used to organise the Bhil women to fight against diverse patriarchies inside the home and outside. Literature especially religious literature of an allegorical character has tremendous power to motivate people to act to change their socio-economic condition. Unfortunately for adivasis in the central Indian region in general and the Bhils in particular there has not been any significant effort till now to transcribe and use their rich oral literature.

Thus what is being done here by the AEP and its affiliates is the systematic creation of a new written literature and performing arts of the Bhils not only for their value in themselves but more for their utility as a crucial DEVELOPMENTAL TOOL through the transcription of their rich oral folklore by their own organic intellectuals who have risen from the process of the struggle to improve their socio-economic condition. While in the case of other modern Indian languages such forums sprang up by themselves in the case of Bhili a special effort has to be made because it is not a written language and being the product of an indigenous culture which is under threat of extinction requires protective promotion.

The penetration of market oriented consumerist culture has led to the breaking down of traditional communitarian bonds not only in urban societies but also in remote agrarian societies like those of the adivasis. Thus the social system prevalent at present promotes cut throat competition among its members and hampers collective action. This in turn leads to violence and crime. This is extremely harmful for society as a whole. So it is of utmost importance that adivasi societies which still retain communitarian social practices be encouraged to thrive and creatively build on these practices so that society as a whole can draw on this valuable resource to counter the threat of evolving into a consumerist mono-culture. For instance there is no sense of belonging in the cities these days leading to the problem of alienation. This is then sought to be corrected through identification with fundamentalist religious organizations which tend to divide society further into narrow communities. Thus the present new intervention by conserving and positively developing one of the sources of rich communitarian culture, development and governance, that of the Bhils, will be a radically systems changing one in the long run.

The form of politics that has come to dominate the globe now is that of first past the post competitive centralised electoral liberal democracy. In this system central governments of nation states tend to override the lower level governments. The local government institutions at the small town and village level suffer most as their needs and aspirations are sacrificed for the development of mega cities and industrial centres. The net result is that there is tremendous destruction of the environment and the livelihood opportunities of the urban and rural poor. This kind of political system is also extremely divisive socially as it tends to pit communities and groups against each other in the fight to gain control of state power which is crucial to secure a good livelihood. Thus it is imperative that a more decentralised and localised form of democratic politics be promoted which works through consensus rather than by competition. The present intervention will provide an impetus for the revival of the traditional village council led management of affairs which is central to the lives of the Bhil adivasis and the eventual evolution of an alternative decentralised political system globally as an antidote to the ills of the present centralised one.

At the micro level of western Madhya Pradesh this new intervention will over time contribute to the ongoing movement of the Bhils for attaining a strong self identity based on a rich written literature that is capable of contending with the literature and culture of the non-adivasis and thus give them social equality with their oppressors. This will in turn help them to negotiate the modern political and economic systems on equal terms with the non-adivasis and thus gain a fair share of the developmental cake.

At the macro level this new literature being the product of an agricultural society will first of all provide intellectual and cultural support for the ongoing national and worldwide efforts for the revival of agriculture which is in crisis all over the world leading to serious problems of food and livelihood security. The modernisation of agriculture based on

artificial inputs has proved to be a failed enterprise and there is a growing trend towards the revival of sustainable organic agriculture. This is especially important for India which is primarily an agricultural country. The main agricultural areas in India have all come under the sway of modern agriculture and have lost the traditional seeds and processes and are suffering from severe erosion of soil quality and water sources.

The Bhils still retain traditional knowledge in this regard and a strengthening of their culture will lead to a strengthening of their agriculture too. At present the worldwide movement for sustainable agriculture lacks a mass base and a supporting culture which will help it to thrive. Sustainable agriculturists are perceived as quixotic deviants rather than as proponents of a serious alternative system. The AEP has actively promoted a sustainable agriculture based socio-economic-political system as a comprehensive and viable alternative and the present intervention by strengthening its cultural dimensions will contribute positively to this movement. At a later point of time an alternative agriculture based system of development that is less destructive of nature can develop from these preliminary efforts.

Finally agricultural societies are all highly religious given their dependence on nature and the need to placate forces which are beyond their control. This is why despite the Nehruvian project of building a secular society and the specific injunction that the state will not function in support of any religion, in practice the majority of Indian society having rural agricultural roots has remained deeply religious and all the mainstream parties including the Communist Party of India in Bengal have to a greater or lesser extent promoted Hinduism. However, of late this has become overly problematical due to the aggressive fundamentalism of the Sangh Parivar. The Hindu fundamentalist organisations have embarked on a proselytisation campaign of the adivasis in violation of their fundamental right to follow freely their own religion as guaranteed under article 25 of the Constitution. The converted adivasis do not get an equal status with the high caste Hindus but are inducted into Hindu society as menials who are even today treated as untouchables by the latter.

The reality of the power of religion in pre-modern agricultural societies has to be acknowledged and fundamentalism has to be countered through promotion of religious diversity. Religious diversity is as much a desired value as cultural diversity for the survival of the human race. The revival of their literature which is traditionally highly religious will automatically lead to a revival of the Bhili animist and nature friendly religion and provide them with an effective antidote to the proselytising thrust of the fundamentalist Hindu organisations.

3. A New Developmental Intervention

The two broad prevalent modes of developmental intervention for the improvement of the socio-economic condition of the adivasis in particular and the rural population in general among NGOs, social movements and the government are that of service delivery and political empowerment. The interventions in the cultural sphere mainly through the use of audio-visual media like street theatre for the purpose of information, education and communication (IEC) have not been independent developmental interventions but have subserved the above mentioned two modes and the lack of a written literature of the adivasis has hampered these efforts. Thus despite over two decades of developmental and empowerment interventions the impact in terms of creating a self confident Bhil population capable of pinpointing and solving their problems independently has been less than desirable. **The intervention of the AEP makes a quantum jump both**

horizontally and vertically from the current practice. Horizontally it makes the original assertion that the creation of a new living literature of the Bhils from their traditional folklore is itself a new and major developmental intervention that can parallel the prevailing two modes in the case of adivasi development because of their lack of a literate culture. Vertically this intervention will result in considerably improving the content and style of the IEC campaigns which are a necessary part of the prevailing two modes of intervention. Moreover, the experience of service delivery and political mass organisation has shown that these processes rarely become self supporting and have to be constantly reinforced with funding and professional assistance by outsiders. In this respect the creation of a literature has historically been a self sustaining process once the initial critical mass of writers and readers has been established either through voluntary efforts or by some organised action.

This brings us to the existing interventions in the field of culture. Baviskar and Stiglmeier have studied some Bhili myths from an academic anthropological perspective so as to better understand the social dynamics of the Bhils. Jyotindra Jain has also studied some of these myths to assess their aesthetic qualities and to determine their relationship with the mainstream Hindu culture. Christian missionaries too have transcribed some of the myths but not in any sustained manner and not with the objective of the creation of a new literature. Similarly the government department of tribal development too has from time to time attempted to publish reading material in Bhili dialects but these too have been haphazard and have necessarily lacked a mass character.

The decade of the nineteen nineties has seen yet another academic project launched by Ganesh Davy for the study of the languages of the adivasis of northern Maharashtra and Gujarat. In this externally funded venture which has little organic linkages with the masses. A biannual journal is published by turns in four different Bhili dialects meaning that new written material is produced in a particular dialect only once in two years. Moreover, there is little attention being paid to the transcription of the folklore of the adivasis. Thus this effort has spread itself thin by dealing with too many languages and so the output in terms of new literature in any of these is quite minimal and lacks the necessary critical mass of writers and readers to make them strong enough to challenge the hegemony of Marathi and Gujarati as the dominant languages. Apart from this there is no clear developmental perspective in Davy's project and neither is there an attempt to creatively build on the rich heritage of the adivasi myths.

The AEP effort, therefore, builds on all these previous interventions while giving them a new and purposeful thrust of reviving Bhili culture with the intention of positing it as a vehicle of sustainable development. The intervention thus seeks to protect and build on the fundamental right to culture of the Bhils guaranteed in article 29 of the Constitution of India. The Muslims and Sikhs have taken advantage of this provision but there has been no such specific cultural rights intervention among adivasis in the central Indian region. Thus what is being implemented by the AEP is a **best practice framework for adivasi cultural renewal** that can not only rejuvenate the living conditions of the Bhils but can be gainfully replicated for the development of other adivasi cultures.

4. The Over-arching Social Problem being Addressed

This intervention addresses the serious problem that the culture of the Bhils is considered to be sub-human by the non-adivasis of the region and even the modern Indian state seeks to destroy the culture of the adivasis nationally by introducing a uniform modernising sweep through its developmental and educational policies. The problem assumes a vicious circle nature as the Bhils internalise this devaluation and tend to reject their

culture. Given that most Bhils are not able to imbibe the modern non-advansi culture in a successful manner this further reduces their ability to fight effectively in the competitive political and economic systems that prevail at present and leaves them even more disrespectful of their own culture.

The extent of this dehumanisation of the Bhils can be illustrated with an example. There was a great Bhil rebel named Tantia who fought the British and their subservient upper caste Hindu landlords valiantly in the latter half of the nineteenth century for over a decade and a half. He was a Robin Hood like character who used to distribute the loot from his raids on the British and the landlords among the poor Bhils. Thus Bhil women used to consider him to be their brother and used to tell their children that Tantia Mama (maternal uncle) would bring gifts for them. He was finally apprehended by the British through treachery and hanged after a summary trial. Following the British the non-advansis of the region regarded him not as a freedom fighter but as a dacoit. Later the term mama too lost its value and degenerated into a pejorative name for the Bhils. The Bhils who have lost independent livelihood opportunities over the last century and a half are today forced to migrate to nearby cities and rich agricultural areas for employment. Thus the Vadodara – Kota passenger which runs on the main Mumbai – Delhi trunk rail route is most of the time filled with Bhils going up and down from their homes to their places of work and back and has come to be called the “mama gari”.

When the process of forming a forum for the revival of advansi culture was begun, the major problem faced was the sense of shame that the educated advansis felt about speaking and writing in Bhili in public places. A pamphlet in Bhili was published to popularise the whole idea. Even senior literate advansis would go into peals of laughter on reading it. The process of reading the pamphlet itself proved to be laborious as there is no written literature in Bhili dialects. What more can be indicative of the extent of decay of a language than this reluctance of the literate Bhils to converse and write in it. Simultaneously the illiterate Bhil masses are being wooed away by television and they do not spend as much time as they used to do to celebrate their own festivals. There is an increasing tendency to celebrate Hindu festivals such as Ganesh Puja and Durga Navaratri instead.

This lack of a positive self image is a major obstacle in the search for a viable system of livelihood for the Bhils. Consequently the core of the intervention draws from the glorious history of the European and modern Indian cultural renaissance movements and posits that the solution to this problem lies in the creation of a strong new literature using the rich classical resource of the Bhils’ oral folklore as the cornerstone of the process of revival of a Bhili culture that can rival the dominant non-advansi culture in all respects and so provide the Bhils with an equal cultural footing in their struggle for emancipation. At a higher level the successful implementation of this intervention will provide a replicable blueprint for the strengthening of non-literate advansi cultures nationally and worldwide and so maintain cultural diversity. Indeed the whole point of the present intervention is to chart out a map for the revival and promotion of advansi cultures in a sustainable way through mass participation.

As mentioned earlier the problem of the marginalisation of advansi culture is closely linked to the proliferation of a consumerist monoculture worldwide which is proving to be dangerously harmful for future human development. Thus by seeking to strengthen advansi cultures the present idea seeks to address this serious problem of loss of cultural diversity on a global scale as will be described in detail later.

5. The Main Systemic Problem being Addressed

The most serious systemic problem that the developmental initiatives in the western Madhya Pradesh region in particular and in adivasi areas in general have been unable to resolve is that they have not been able to inspire the adivasis to devise and then implement their own solutions to their problems of social, economic and cultural deprivation due to the culture of silence which stifles their articulation and innate genius giving rise to the problem of social devaluation described above. Invariably schemes and plans that have originated elsewhere have been dumped on the adivasis with the result that not only has any sustainable process of development not evolved but that the adivasis have continued to remain mute recipients of the crumbs thrown to them. This has meant that the age-old exploitative structures have continued to hold sway. In many cases new developmental initiatives have been sabotaged by the non-adivasis who have been entrusted with their implementation.

For instance watershed development schemes have not addressed the basic lack of land resources with the adivasis in the region which has meant that even after successful completion of these schemes the adivasis have not been able to augment their incomes to higher levels sufficient for sustainable living from these small holdings because the enhanced production is not sufficient for the purpose. The response of the government has been the introduction of jersey cow based milk production and vermiculture. These, however, have failed because there is insufficient wasteland available for fodder development enough to make these latter schemes successful. The net result is that the adivasis who took government loans to start these projects are now in debt which they cannot possibly repay. This is in fact the situation with most subsidized poverty alleviation schemes of the government. The failure of the Integrated Rural Development Programme to bring about any widespread sustainable income generation due to this inability to take into account the views of the beneficiaries has been well documented.

Similarly political empowerment interventions have addressed agenda close to the heart of the activists without paying attention to the actual demands of those who are being organised leading to the eventual dissipation of these movements. A very good example of this is the Narmada Bachao Andolan. The movement initially started by addressing the genuine fear voiced by the adivasi oustees of the Sardar Sarovar dam that they would be displaced from their lands without proper rehabilitation. Later, however, the movement was converted into a battle to stop the construction of the dam altogether mainly on the basis of the ideological predilections of the non-adivasi activists who led the movement. The pressure of the movement forced the government to better the rehabilitation package on offer and the adivasis plumped for this but the activists went on fighting for the no-dam option with lesser and lesser people. This lack of articulation of the adivasis has meant that the two decades of work put in by various development and empowerment organisations has not been able to bring about self sufficiency in the Bhils.

This lack of articulation can be seen also in the lack of effective implementation of two very important statutes. The fifth schedule of the Constitution of India provides for special governance of the notified scheduled adivasi areas in a state on the recommendations of the tribal advisory council comprised of adivasi legislators. Similarly the Panchayati Raj Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) provides for the adivasi gram sabhas to be paramount in deciding on the use of the resources of the village and in resolving disputes. However, in reality these two powerful statutes are not being implemented in the way they should be because the adivasis and their elected representatives are not able to press for this in any articulate manner.

The urgent need therefore is that the adivasis be able to articulate their felt needs and act in an organised manner in accordance with their own genius so that they are fulfilled. The publication of literature in Bhili dialects addresses precisely this problem of lack of articulation among the Bhils. The Bhils are now writing about their problems and their culture and history in independent public fora that are funded by their own contributions and a tremendous process of increasing articulation has been set into motion. The confidence created by this intervention among a new class of Bhili intellectuals has also lead them to write in other languages in the mainstream media.

The present intervention is thus an initial step in the direction of building up the ability of effective articulation of Bhil adivasis as a prelude to breaking the deafening culture of silence that muzzles them. The vast Bhil masses remain unheard because what they say does not carry enough cultural clout to make any impact.

There are many NGOs and people's organisations in western Madhya Pradesh doing worthwhile work in the spheres of service delivery and political empowerment. There is a significant population associated with these organisations either directly as beneficiaries or participants or indirectly as well wishers and supporters. Workshops organised by these agencies and the AEP to critically analyse the results of the work done by them over the past decade and a half have clearly brought out the need for a concentrated intervention on the cultural front to give a wider base to their activities and also to counter the negative attitudes of the administration, the Hindu fundamentalist organisations and the non-advansi development workers and social activists. This is the basis of the present intervention in this direction, the most important being the researching of the history of famous Bhil martyrs like Khajya Naik, Motia Bhil, Tantia Bhil, Chitu Kirar and others. Sustained lobbying and mass celebrations of the martyrdom of these heroes has resulted in their being acknowledged as freedom fighters of repute and the recognition that the Bhils had played a major resistive role against the British. Similarly Bhili songs and stories and modern versions of these have been recorded and published.

6. Positive Local Impact of the Intervention

A narrative will bring out the way in which people's lives can change from a cultural initiative. The adivasis in Potla village in Dewas district were held in thrall by the only sahuakar in the village who used to rule their lives in all respects. Some of them heard of the plans for holding the martyrdom celebrations of Tantia Bhil and came and told the rest of the villagers about it and distributed the pamphlets and booklets on Tantia's brave deeds to the educated adivasi youth. The result was that the villagers decided to participate in the yatra to Tantia's Samadhi. For this they needed to hire a truck to carry their possessions and they contacted their sahuakar who initially agreed to give them his truck on hire. But on the day of their setting out the sahuakar declined to give them the truck and also threatened not to give them any loans for the forthcoming cropping season.

This incensed the villagers so much that they decided to socially boycott the sahuakar and his family and made alternative arrangements to participate in the yatra. There was no need for activists to go and organise the people as it just took a few pamphlets and a general milieu of cultural revival to bring about the end to generations of servitude. The emancipatory power of literature and its capability to bring about a positive change in the life of the oppressed has been established time and again throughout history and the French Revolution is the well known example in this regard. The American freedom fighters were influenced by the writings of Thomas Paine to rebel against the British. The freedom fighters for India's independence too were motivated by the publication of new

and liberating literature. Indeed the dalits in this country have been far more enterprising in this regard as compared to the adivasis of the central and western Indian regions.

The important thing is that this new literature must be published as part of a general milieu of emancipatory socio-economic change. The work of the various civil society organisations of the Bhils over the past two decades in general and the activities of the AEP in particular have created such a milieu of change and it only needs a systematic and well articulated ideology for its further expansion which the present intervention intends to provide by encouraging the people to hark back to their rich oral folklore and their nature friendly animist beliefs and practices.

7. Potential for Wider Application

All over the country and even worldwide adivasi cultures are on the verge of extinction. This has something to do with the decline of indigenous agriculture on which these cultures were based and with the homogenising culture of western consumerism which has been popularised through television soap operas, sports broadcasts and commercials. A global market is sought to be created for the products of the industrial west by washing away local cultural influences from the brains of people through this powerful cultural onslaught of western consumerism.

For instance the tremendous concentration of the audio-visual media on the Cricket World Cup in South Africa in 2003 seeped through to a remote adivasi village in the region where an old woman who did not know anything about cricket still lamented the fact that India had lost the final. The irony is that nationalism is being promoted through an unproductive symbol such as cricket when such poor people as this adivasi woman are on the edge of starvation because of a lack of viable livelihood opportunities just to sell various consumerist products of industry. A victory in the final would not in any way have improved the living conditions of poor people in this country but a major improvement in their condition brought about by the adoption of more appropriate development policies would automatically ensure that we win more accolades in the international arena in sports which are played by more countries of the world than cricket.

This erosion of cultural diversity has come to be recognised as a serious impediment to the future of the human race. Thus my innovation by stressing that the adivasi culture and the agricultural base from which it springs have the potential to offer an alternative to this destructive homogenisation of culture and livelihoods has vast areas of application not only in the preservation of adivasi cultures but also that of the culture of more so called advanced societies. The AEP innovation provides a **best practice framework** for carrying out such a revival and preservation of cultural and livelihood diversity.

8. The Larger Impact of this Innovation

It is difficult to state exactly how many people have already benefited from the implementation of the innovation so far. The people who are consciously involved with the various organisations that are a part of this process number about one hundred thousand. However, many adivasis who may not be openly supportive of these efforts due to various reasons secretly go along with the process and try to move it forward in many ways. Thus people even in remote areas have heard of the revival of the Tantia festival and have drawn heart from it without having participated in it. Many mainstream adivasi political figures from all parties have asserted in public fora that the revivalist movement of the Bhils is a positive development and some have even participated in the programmes of the AEP. The pressure created by the AEP so far has forced the government to take note of rising level of awareness of the adivasis and initiate beneficial

development policies which have helped the whole of the adivasi population of the four states of Western India which is close to twelve million.

Today we have a globalised world with far flung nations and communities tied together by trade in commodities and services, cross border manufacturing, financial transfers and also a massive communications industry. Thus it is relatively easy for the more well endowed societies to press their social, economic and political thought on those who are not so advantaged. This process is happening at all levels from the village to the global. We have a situation in which cultural production is taking place in the affluent west and being broadcast for consumption by the world at large. The western cultural icons and agencies dominate the powerful medium of television, the newer and equally powerful medium of the internet as well as the various printed media.

This cultural domination favours the economic interests of the various corporate behemoths that control the world economy. It is in the interests of these corporations that the cultural tastes of the population of the whole world are homogenised. This has created a critical situation for human survival with the loss of diversity in the biological, economic and social spheres in addition to the cultural sphere. As mentioned earlier the only way in which this dangerous cultural homogenisation and erosion of diversity caused by thoughtless industrialism can be challenged is by rediscovering the virtues of traditional agriculture and the culture that it gave rise to. Today it is the indigenous people worldwide who still retain the skills and knowledge of traditional agriculture and the accompanying culture. Thus the work of the AEP by reviving and conserving the indigenous Bhil culture will challenge the dominant system of development and governance which is increasingly being adopted at all levels from the local to the global. Since centralisation and homogenisation invariably necessitates violence which is so evident in various forms today the AEP's stress on decentralisation and difference presents a prospectus for peace and amity worldwide. This intervention, therefore, will impact development thought and practice and make it more amenable to the evolution of sustainable living and working patterns in the future at all levels from the local to the global.