PREFACE

The present thesis "Dynamics of Politics and Challenges in Development: A Study of Paniyans in Tamilnadu" is an outcome of the research work done by me during August 1992 to December 1999 as a research scholar in the Department of Anthropology, University of Madras. The thesis focuses mainly two aspects; one is political and the other is developmental, and tries to show their interrelationship in the context of the Paniyan, a tribal society living in and around Gudalur subdivision of Nilgiris District in Tamilnadu.

My interest in the tribals dates back to my school days when I was a student of Government Girls' High School, G. Udayagiri in the Phulbani District of Orissa. Udayagiri is the heartland of Kandh tribe and the students of our school, excepting a very few of us, were all tribals. The memory of the place and the people is still fresh in my mind and I had a few tribal friends whose innocence, honesty and unpretentious living are something which I always cherish as unforgettable moments of profound past experience. Such an opportunity came again, stimulated by the award of a Fellowship from the Tribal Welfare Department of Government of India, to study the Paniyan tribe choosing the samples from the Gudalur Taluk of Tamilnadu for this research work and that is how this work was started.

Indian tribal situation represents an instance of social transformation articulated by contemporary political forces and developmental designs. This project is born out of a concern to relate the idea of social change to the problematics of politics and development in the context of a tribe which is enslaved as bonded labourers from the pre-independent days. The complexity of modernity and emerging predominance of politicisation process in all the spheres of life have their quota for the visible tribal transformation, and that has been the main focus of this thesis. The non-occurrence of expected transition from an exploited agrarian labourer society to the emergence of an independent social structure does
encounter a moratorium which has been analysed from differing and contending perspectives. The ground realities of tribalism which have been characterised by kinship, religious obscurantism, stagnation and resignation are dealt with special reference to the constraints faced in the process of development. I have also attempted to explain the emergence of modernity on a traditional set up of the tribals and the exigencies it suffers in the politico-burecratic set up in the post-independent India. Thus the primary aim of this work is to a look at this emerging society and to evaluate the process of development for showing an alternative paradigm which would make the beneficiaries participate in the process to reach the mainstream development.

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