Press Note/For Publication

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‘Important to bridge the gap between the idea of crime and the idea of justice in the interest of deepening democracy in India.’ G.N. Devy

New Delhi Professor Ganesh N. Devy, noted tribal studies scholar, cultural activist and chief editor of the fifty volume, multi-lingual People’s Linguistic Survey of India delivered this year’s Social Change Golden Jubilee lecture. Social Change is a social science quarterly journal brought out by the Council for Social Development (CSD) and published by SAGE. Started in 1971, more than 50 years later the journal continues to be a platform for innovative scholarship, thought and critical debate.

Prof. Devy’s online lecture entitled, ‘Thinking of Crime, the State, Migrant Population and the Missing Justice’ looked at the idea of crime as a contested concept, examining current contexts and its historical background. His presentation outlined the 'idea of crime' as understood by the colonial government in India and its continuing strands by the country's post-colonial regimes till today. It was in 1871, when Lord Mayo, the Viceroy to India, introduced the bill leading to the infamous Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) resulting in the segregation of a certain set of people, professions and lifestyles from the rest of society. The communities brought under the provisions of the CTA 150 years ago, are today known as Denotified Tribes and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs). Mostly nomadic in habit, the DNTs, said the speaker, have suffered and continue to suffer humiliation in the history of modern India. This section represented the migrant population in the history of the world who were victimised by rulers from time to time. They were among the most marginalised even though they solidly contributed to making of human civilisation throughout history.

This lecture, supported by SAGE Publications, the Anthropological Survey of India, India International Centre and CSD, discussed the thought processes that have gone into the new definition of crime which are removed from the most commonly accepted definition of crime. In that context, Prof. Devy said it was important to immediately bridge the gap between the idea of crime and the idea of justice in the interests of deepening democracy in India.

Introducing the speaker, Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty, editor of Social Change, stressed that migration has become one of the most fundamental
issues of our time that required urgent attention. In his remarks, Prof. Muchkund Dubey, President, Council for Social Development, pointed out that the common link between the nation’s tribal population, migrants and citizenship idea, expanded on by Prof. Devy, was the cruel violation of human rights.

CSD is an institute of advanced research and policy analysis in the fields of social sciences and humanities with centres located in Delhi and Hyderabad. Led by Durgabai Deshmukh, it was established in 1962 by a group of scholars and policymakers involved in the area of social development. The Council through its research publications and advocacy seeks to promote dialogue and debate and secure justice for all, especially for the voiceless and the marginalised. To translate policy into practice, CSD routinely engages with policy and opinion leaders through its research and advocacy projects.

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