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Performing Indigeneity on a Sacred Hill, Logo Buru

Abstract: For most Santals, the pilgrimage to Logo Buru in Jharkhand means to revive the sense of belonging to a sacred landscape, seen as a "pristine place" untouched by development. This is particularly important for those who work in mines or in the steel plants. Most of the Santal writers, active in Logo Buru, claim to be the disciples of Ragunath Murmu, the playwright and social reformer who invented a Santali script in the Thirties. For Adivasis coming from other states, the performance gives them the opportunity to share the revival of a tradition which is strong in Jharkhand, since it is linked to the politics of that State, created in 2000. The article shows that the pilgrimage to Logo Buru, organized by Santal writers and activists and patronized by politicians, can be viewed as a critical archive generating different interpretations, to produce a way of sharing which makes sense for all, bestowing the participants with a new 'authenticity'.

Keywords: *Santals, Jharkhand, pilgrimage, performance, literature, ethnic movement*

The Performance of Indigeneity

Anthropologists often treat identities as being arbitrary constructions, downgrading the importance of culture to stress the invention of tradition.[1] But identities are not created from nothing, and there is continuity as well as innovation in the process of reinventing tradition.

The concept of indigeneity with its international character stresses the ambivalent relationship between globalisation and locality. Indigenous peoples are not essentialised ethnic entities, but indigenous groups corresponding to one or several criteria of the working definition of ILO:[2] historical continuity; experience of colonisation; social and cultural difference from the majority population; economic and social marginality, with a lack of adequate control of the economic and political institutions that control their living conditions.

Indigeneity may not be consciously designed to serve a contemporary purpose, but I argue that some dimensions of indigeneity aim at challenging marginalization by reading the present in the light of an idealised past. This makes us question how indigeneity is constructed, reproduced, made and unmade.

During the last two decades in Middle India, the Santal, the Munda and other Adivasi[3] groups have put great store on reframing their festivals, performing them at a regional level, to enhance the visibility of Adivasi religion and to express environmental and political claims.

The term 'performance' has been used by anthropologists for events seen as ritualised forms of action, serving as metaphors of identity.[4] 'Performativity' as a mode of bodily or vocal action is demarcated from quotidian interaction,

[1] Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1983).

[2] The International Labour Organisation at Geneva has taken several initiatives to establish the rights of indigenous peoples.

[3] The term Adivasi, from *adi* – 'before' and *vasi* – 'resident' refers to the first occupants of the territory. It is a self-designation of Indian peoples formerly known as 'tribal'.

[4] Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell U. P., 1974).

embedded in a ritual context, and defined by communicative intent.[5]

In this article I describe how indigeneity is performed on the sacred hill of Logo Buru, one of the places through which the Santal ancestors passed in a glorious past. The performance enables Adivasis to articulate memory work into a powerful trope of Adivasi heritage, to promote their visibility in the state of Jharkhand. The pilgrimage links religious and symbolic values which operate at the local level to the political agenda of the state, since Adivasi rights are ignored when other interests are at stake.

The Logo Buru Pilgrimage

I came to know about Logo Buru from the Santal Writers' association[6] in Jamshedpur, a Company town in Jharkhand. These writers, often senior employees in the city, consider it their duty to help organise the annual pilgrimage to Logo Buru. The pilgrimage involves a return to Santal mythology, to recapture, as they say, the "consciousness of Santal identity". Thousands of Santals come to Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand, for the occasion, from the neighbouring states and from Assam.

Santals consider themselves as Adivasis, the first settlers on the land. The term *Adivasi,* coined in 1915 by leaders of the Munda tribe, reflected the awareness of the exploitation of tribals in colonial times.[7] At Logo Buru the ancestors settled for a while during their migrations.[8] This was before the Santals were divided into sub-clans, so Logo Buru evokes pristine Santal society.

The event is organized by Adivasi intellectuals and by the Jharkhand party, who advertise it in local newspapers and through Cultural Associations across the country. In the 2000's, these actors wanted to convey a message to Jharkhand citizens at large, taking advantage of the presence of Shibu Soren, then Chief minister[9] of Jharkhand, and members of his government. His presence brings together indigeneity, performance and the state, allowing the Santals to express a form of empowerment, since the Chief Minister was a Santal after all.

Performing indigeneity during the Logo Buru festival has a cultural as well as political meaning, and includes dancing, singing and narrating the old myths. The presence of the tribal leaders seem to convey that, as one writer in Jamshedpur puts it, "We are coming to thank the *buru bongas* (hill deities) for all we have achieved". Events such as Logo Buru generate different interpretations, but produce a meaning which makes sense for all, bestowing the participants with a new 'authenticity'. The term 'authenticity' implies that the cultural images and symbols displayed define a new meaning for the general public, here the Jharkhand citizens. In other contexts, like the Amerindian activism in Brazil studied by Conklin,[10] authenticity helps produce an acknowledgment of the legitimacy of cultural and political claims.

For most Santals, the pilgrimage works to revive the sense of belonging to a

[5] Félicia Hugues-Freeland, ed., *Ritual Performance,* ASA Monographs 35 (London and New York: Routledge, 1998). Edward L. Schieffelin, "Problematizing Performance", in Félicia Hugues-Freeland, ed., *Ritual Performance,* 194-207.

[6] The association of the Santal writers founded in the late sixties aims at the diffusion of the Santal language and literature.

[7] Marine Carrin, Pralay Kanungo and Gérard Toffin, eds., *The Politics of Ethnicity in India, Nepal and China* (Delhi: Primus, 2013), 2-24.

[8] Peter Andersen, Marine Carrin and Santosh Soren, *From Rain Fire to Santal Insurrection: Reasserting Identity through Narratives* (Delhi: Manohar, 2011), 39-88.

[9] The Prime Minister is the head of the National government, a chief Minister heads the government of each state.

[10] Beth Conklin, "Body Paint, Feathers, and VCRs: Aesthetics and Authenticity in Amazonian Activism", *American Ethnologist*, 24.4 (1997), 711-737.

sacred landscape, untouched by development, and this is particularly important for those who work in mines or in the steel plants in Jamshedpur, Rourkela or Bokaro. For Santals from other states, the performance offers the opportunity to share a revival of tradition which is strong in Jharkhand, and linked to the politics of the State. The State of Jharkhand was founded in 2000 from the southern districts of Bihar, including the Chota Nagpur plateau and the Santal Parganas. Though a 'tribal' state, with the Munda, Santal, Ho and Oraon as the largest Adivasi populations, it has a Hindu majority, due to immigration from the plains. Thus, the state no longer corresponds to the original Adivasi demands.

Climbing Logo Buru

From early morning, participants climb the hill, singing: sometimes they stop for rest or for a picknick. Officials of the Jharkhand Party, writers and intellectuals form a separate delegation, which should arrive first on the top of the hill. Whenever this group, escorted by a few policemen, stops and sings, the rest of the audience waits. The official members, the minister and his escort, should arrive at the summit before nightfall, to watch the sunset on the cave of Logo Buru. This cave stands for the mythic Harata cave, where the Santal ancestors stayed seven years. Most participants sleep in a big clearing just below the cave, a place seen as auspicious. Later in the evening, the officials sit on a dais and watch 'the cultural program', a version of tribal dances with performers dressed in green, the colour of the Jharkhand party.[11] Typically, the program includes martial dances where young Santals sport their bows and arrows, or 'animal dances',[12] which evoke wilderness and indigeneity. The female dances celebrate the role of women in agricultural activities, especially when they 'marry' the paddy seedlings. These dances represent an official version of village dances, produced by the Jharkhand party. This performance aims at presenting the Santals as hard working and disciplined, while other dances performed on the side, not in view of officials, include comic interludes and improvised sequences. The night is spent in singing and dancing, while people cook the food they have brought and the whole scene looks like a gigantic picnic. Young Santals play the flute and *banam* – a kind of fiddle – and some decorate their heads with peacock feathers, as they do for the traditional spring hunt.[13]

In the morning, the chief minister, followed by the officials, enter the cave one by one. They peep through a hole which allows them to contemplate *Cae Champa*, the old Santal kingdom. The common people follow. Some of the participants say the image is rather like a ship wrecked at sea, while others see only a dark hole. The pilgrimage enables laymen, politicians, and writers to share the contemplation of a mythical kingdom, which nobody can localize on a map or fix in time. It allows mutual recognition of a shared Santal culture, and to share the luring experience of the loss of *Cae Campa*. Unseen, the past is an enigma, unless its mirror effect is

[11] There have been splits and mergers in the various Jharkhand Party history, but the green has remained the emblematic colour of the movement. For the history of the Jharkhand Party, see Marine Carrin, "Retour au bosquet sacré, réflexion sur la réinvention d'une culture Adivasi", Marine Carrin, Christophe Jaffrelot, eds., *Castes et tribus: résistance et autonomie dans la société Indienne,* Purusartha 23 (Paris: EHESS, 2002), 233-264.

[12] Here the dancers mimic wild animals, evoking both the wilderness and the hunt.

[13] The spring hunt (*disom sendera*) is now banned in many regions, but the Santals still maintain this ritually important hunt, often as a protest and a cultural assertion.

imagined through the evocative device of the cave. Some pilgrims say they have not been able to perceive the truth, while others state they have understood better the meaning of the loss. All, however, enjoy the place and have fun at the picnic.

While this is going on, the activists of the indigenous Santal script, *ol'chiki,* offer incense and flowers to the image of its inventor, Raghunath Murmu. Ol' chiki has become an important element of Santal identity. The activists are usually members of the Sarna Dhorom, the religious reform movement formed in the seventies by Murmu's disciples. The movement has been working for the revitalization of Santal religion, language and culture, leading to the recognition of Santali as one of the important minority languages of India in 2002.

Nobody knows for sure when the pilgrimage started, but these last years, Santal writers and intellectuals, whether they use *ol'chiki* or the regional Indian scripts, have been very active in the organization of the performance. I felt it was important to see the pilgrimage as an old practice, though I am sure it did not exist in the seventies. Answering my question with a sibylline smile, Digambara Hasdak, a Santal linguist, commented: "In Logo Buru, we try to forget the present time to come closer to our ancestors, take Logo Buru as the image of the past encapsulated in a pristine place". Obviously, the pilgrimage worked in the minds of my companions as a way to experience truth, as revealed by the contemplation of the cave. Recapturing subaltern pasts leads the writers to evoke myth and narrative – oral and written – to create a glorious version of this past. The Santal kingdom – which cannot be traced today – and the decline from that glorious past are often told, or staged in popular theatre as historic drama (*itihas drama).* The Santal writers, whether they belong to the association or not, explain that cultural assertion is really "the stronger drive". Thus they are enthusiastically participating in the Logo Buru pilgrimage, though nobody seem to recall when it was decided to associate politicians and writers in the celebration.

When we met in the office of the Jharkhand Party in Jamshedpur in 2008, the writers explained how things had changed: The question no longer was to transform the past into a golden age, they said, rather it was urgent to see how Jharkhand as a region had been jeopardized through party politics. During the discussion, however, the partisans of playing the ethnic card in Adivasi politics were opposed by more moderate writers, who thought the regional card must be played, even if corruption had poisoned regional ideals.

Marching to Logo Buru means, for everybody, sharing a festive event with other Santals and Adivasis. The event is also a celebration of the achievements of the Jharkhand party, though some participants criticise it, or belong to other parties. It would be naïve to exclude politics from the pilgrimage to Logo Buru, even if the participants stress the idea of communion. Still, it did not matter if opponents of the Chief Minister Shibu Soren were present, since the pilgrimage encompasses party politics.

Facing a Glorious Past

Participants do not share the same experience at Logo Buru though all say the pilgrimage allows them to renew their consciousness of being Adivasi. The Santals have experienced what Samoddar calls memocide,[14] since schooling and pressure from Hindu culture has obscured and even erased their cultural memory. For most Santals, participation in the Logo Buru pilgrimage fills the gap caused by this memocide, linking the evocation of the legendary hill to their confrontation with the degraded environment. Logo Buru, they say, appears as "the land of the deities (*bongas*), the place to remember *Cae Champa*, the mythical Santal kingdom". "When we climb the hill, we understand what we have lost", some said. The loss, here, refers to the brutal suppression of the 1855 Santal rebellion by the British, and to the failure of other rebellions. It evokes the idea that Adivasi resistance started with Sidhu and Kanhu, the chiefs of the rebellion, and that resistance is still going on. It is this tradition of insurgency that is commemorated in Logo Buru, since the event shows a way to re-enchant the landscape by decolonising Adivasi subjectivities.

Celebrating Santal identity in Logo Buru in the early days of November each year, the Santals affirm their solidarity with other environmental struggles where Adivasi villagers have been trying to prevent mining in other ancestral mountains. For the Santal, Munda, Ho and Oraon, hills like Logo Buru represent a sacred geography.

The Logo Buru pilgrimage defends the hill as a sacred place of the Santals, who, like other Adivasis, project their identity on the landscape, as part of a memory work.[15] Hills have become emblems of indigeneity and must be protected. The Rajmahal Hills have recently been defended by Adivasis claiming to be the guardians of their fauna, flora and fossils. This defence also partakes of the environmental struggle in Jharkhand where Adivasis experience massive degradation of the forest. This struggle has involved constant conflict over the last fifty years, sometimes involving violent clashes with the police.

[14] Ranabir Samaddar, *Memory, Identity, Power Politics in the Jungle Mahals 1890-1950* (Hyderabad and London: Sangam Books, 1998).

[15] Daniel J. Rycroft, "From History to Heritage: Adivasi Identity and Hul Sengel", in Marine Carrin and Lidia Guzy, eds., *Voices from the Periphery: Subalternity and Empowerment in India* (Delhi: Routledge, 2012), 53-58.

From Indigeneity to the Idea of Tribal Heritage

In an era of globalised indigeneity, questions of cultural politics are omnipresent, focusing on the limitations of the nation-state to fully recognise the new and historically contingent parameters of indigenous citizenship. Indigenousness is a contentious matter in India and generates heated debates all over the world. If the Scheduled Tribes in India are termed 'indigenous', we are speaking about a population of 83 million. Merlan argues that the impetus of indigeneity has come from contexts of liberal democratic 'political cultures'. She defines 'criterial' indigeneity as using "criteria, or conditions that enable identification of the 'indigenous' as a global 'kind". By 'relational' she designates definitions grounded

in relations between the 'indigenous' and their 'others', rather than in properties inherent in the 'indigenous' themselves.[16]

Béteille, using a criterial definition, highlights the conceptual difficulties in accepting any category of people in India as 'indigenous'.[17] To him, 'indigenous people' is an idea rather than a concept, since it serves evocative as much as analytical purposes, while its referent tends to shift from one country to another.

Using a relational approach, Xaxa asserts that the denial, by the dominant, of territorial rights and privileges to tribal communities has led tribals in India to adopt the idea of indigenous people. Whether the people in question are "indigenous to the territory or area they live in is a question that will always be contested. What however has come to be accepted (is) that they have developed social relations with the territory in question".[18]

Among Adivasi societies, the question of indigeneity involves different levels of representation and agency. Ascribed indigeneity, here, is seen as imposed on Adivasis by dominant ideology, or by state politics, constructing the tribals as exotic, jungly or ignorant. The same ideology prevails at school, where Hindu teachers are contemptuous of Adivasi religious practices and way of life, justifying their view by an 'ideology of development'. Adivasis must be 'uplifted', and their children should learn 'how to become good citizens'; they should reform their diet, and stop eating beef. This again justifies the imposition of Hindu gods, such as Ganesh and the omnipresent Saraswati, goddess of learning, on the walls of Adivasi class-rooms, as a strategy to bring Adivasi children into the Hindu fold.[19] Similarly, participation in the festivities of Independence Day should lead them to identify with the nation. School, then, is one of the places where indigeneity is consciously unmade.[20] The idea of Adivasi heritage can be understood through the analytical concept of 'memory-work', that is, the material articulation of a relationship between the past and the present, as an elaboration of the contested space between memory and history.[21]

The tribal religion, sometimes called Sarna Dhorom, is a system of belief in the deities called *bongas*, shared by the Mundari speaking tribes.[22] The cult is not marked by formal institutions, but expressed in family worship and sacrifices. The deities are represented by stones and trees and dwell in a sacred grove called Sarna by the Munda, Dessauli by the Ho, and Jaher by the Santal. The sacred grove is a stand of virgin forest left untouched when the village was founded, which shelters the stones of the spirits associated with the village and with the Creation Myth. The Sarna deities receive sacrifices during the main agricultural rituals and women dance in homage to them. In every village, the grove represents the forest and has become emblematic of indigenous religion.[23]

The sacred grove has recently been recognized by the government of Jharkhand as the 'natural temple' of the Mundari groups. This implies that Animism which was considered 'backward' has been officially recognized as a religion. The Sarna religion has no textual tradition but relies on myths and songs sharing a common

[16] Francesca Merlan, "Indigeneity: Global and Local", *Current Anthropology*, 50.3 (2009), 303-334.

[17] André Béteille, "The Idea of Indigenous People", *Current Anthropology*, 39.2 (1998), 187-192.

[18] Virginius Xaxa, "Transformation of Tribes in India: Terms of Discourse", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34.24 (Jun. 12-18, 1999), 1519-1524.

[19] Pralay Kanungo, "Hindutva's Entry into a 'Hindu Province': Early Years of RSS", *Economic and Political Weekly,* 38.31 (August 2-8, 2002), 3293-3303; Peggy Froer, "Emphasizing Others: The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in a Central Indian Tribal Community", *JRAI* (N.S.) 1 (2006), 39-59.

[20] Peter Berger, "Dimensions of Indigeneity in Highland Odisha, India", *Asian Ethnology*, 73 (2014), 19-37.

[21] Rycroft, "From History to Heritage".

[22] The linguistic family includes some nineteen Austro-Asiatic languages. See Norman Zide, *Studies in Comparative Austro-Asiatic Linguistics* (La Hague, London and Paris: Mouton, 1966).

[23] Marine Carrin-Bouez, *La fleur et l'os: symbolisme et rituel chez les Santal* (Paris: EHESS, 1986).

semantic structure.

Logo Boro at the Crossroads of Intellectual Genealogies in Jharkhand

Most of the Santal writers active in Logo Buru claim to be the disciples of Raghunath Murmu, the Santal social reformer who invented a Santal script in the thirties. There were then major reform movements among the Santals and the Hos, led by Silu Santal and Duka Ho. These ethnic movements were "considerably shaped by the Gandhian plan of action",[24] and banned the consumption of rice-beer, since alcohol was seen as impure. Raghunath Murmu, like another reformer, Lako Bodra, never criticized the use of rice beer, which he saw as a part of traditional culture. Though Murmu claimed divine inspiration through dreams he did not want to appear at mass meetings like a religious guru or political leader. He wanted the Santals to return to their old traditions and abandon witchcraft. His visions had convinced him that they could be united by the symbol of Sarna, the sacred grove, and enabled to recapture the golden age. Many Santals came to profess the Sarna religion, and returned to old practices such as eating beef, drinking rice-beer, and observing traditional rituals, while abstaining from the non-tribal festivals.[25] He also changed transmission of knowledge in Santal society by allowing youth volunteers to teach his script – *ol chiki* – to adults and children. Murmu's stories and plays were intended to form a corpus of Santali literature, available to everybody.

Murmu considered his script as a gift from the Santal deities, and the script became the main character of his plays. He wanted to convey Santal pride as a message which could be understood by the illiterate, by staging his plays in the villages. When the heroes in Murmu's plays manage to decipher the new script, they declare that they have *liberated adivasi culture*. The plays allowed a great number of interpreters, actors, narrators, and singers to participate in an intellectual awakening. Murmu's aim was to promote a cultural ideal, a Santal culture deeply rooted in song, dance and arts. While most Santal writers talk of poverty and exploitation, Murmu does not really deal with poverty: he concentrates on cultural loss associated with ignorance and deprivation.

Murmu tried to avoid direct association with the Jharkhand movement but founded a cultural association (*Sarna Dharam Semlet*) to sensitize youth to the tribal heritage. But the Jharkhand leaders, enjoying strong Santal support, soon realized that a highly developed tribal language with a script could become an argument for the formation of a separate state. The *ol chiki* script is still controversial, since it imposes a third script on children who already have two scripts to learn (usually *devanagari* and Roman alphabet). *Ol Chiki*, as well as the Ho and Kharia scripts invented in the thirties, were not really needed as instruments of communication but serve as symbols of cultural assertion.[26] They were presented as the remnants of an old, forgotten culture. Among all these groups, the inventor of the script was

[24] Sanjukta Das Gupta, *Adivasis and the Raj: Socio-economic Transition of the Hos, 1820-1932* (Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011), 295.

[25] Sitakant Mahapatra, *Modernization and Ritual Identity and Change in Santal Society* (Delhi: Oxford U. P., 1986), 52; Marine Carrin, "Retour au bosquet sacré", 247.

[26] For a comparison of Adivasi script and their diffusion, see Marine Carrin, *Le Parler des Dieux: le Discours rituel santal entre l'Oral et l'Écrit* (Nanterre: Société d'Ethnologie, in press).

seen as a man of pure heart, capable of discovering the imprints of lost letters in the forest. The possession of a script was seen as raising the cultural level of the indigenous community, providing it with the status of a civilization.[27] Some non-Adivasi leaders recognized Raghunath Murmu's script.[28] Still, many Adivasis reject *ol Chiki*, feeling that English, Hindi or the main regional Indian languages offer better career opportunities.

[27] Carrin, "Retour au bosquet sacré", 248.

[28] Thus the raja of Mayurbhanj, who tried to preserve his state from amalgamation to Odisha sponsored the first fonts of *ol chiki* letters, arguing that the script proved that the tribal population of his state was highly civilized.

The Tribalization of Jharkhand

In the 1970s, Ram Dayal Munda, a linguist and musician, founded the *Department of the Regional and Tribal Languages* at Ranchi University. Munda organized tribal language programs, attracting tribal and non-tribal students, who became activists and leaders of a cultural revitalization movement. One day, Munda quoted a slogan he had heard from a visiting professor, declaring that the tribals "will be saved by dance".[29]

[29] Carol Babiracki, "Saved by Dance: The Movement of Autonomy in Jharkhand", *Asian Music,* 32 (2000), 35.

In 1986, Munda's supporters formed the *All Jharkhand Students Union* which, for a while, dominated the Jharkhand leadership. Meanwhile, literature, dance and music were performed by tribal students at the University but also in the city. Each ethnic group festival, whether tribal or non-tribal, Animist, Hindu or Christian, was soon celebrated in a recreated village dancing ground (*akhra*). The Department troupes also performed in regional festivals and in the Republic Day parade in Delhi. But not in the villages, since their performance was an urban display, intended to represent the coexistence of different identities in Jharkhand.

Ram Dayal Munda explained to me, by the end of the nineties, that he looked at the Jharkhand not just as a political movement, but as an experience of social reconstruction, "as doing things together, like dancing". Munda, who had taught in Minnesota,[30] was influenced by the American idea of multi-culturalism (he often cited the festival of the First Nations in the USA). He strongly denounced the inner colonization of Jharkhand by multi-nationals, when he became, later, a member of the Indian Parliament.

[30] Ram Dayal Munda submitted his PhD thesis on the "Structural features of the Vaisnava songs of the Panchpargania (dialect of) Bengali. A study of the language of Poetry" at the University of Minnesota in the 1970s. My copy is not dated.

I argue that the staged displays Munda promoted still inspire the Logo Buru performances. They differ from the village dances since they are limited to a handful of rehearsed themes, and do not follow the seasons. They look like desacralized versions of village dances – where the dancers pay homage to the tribal deities – and have been restyled again in the nineties, when leaders began to think of Jharkhand as 'a single cultural area'.

In Jharkhand, the Marxists were critical of this 'culturalist' approach, pointing to the gap between the ideal society danced out in the cultural programs, and the realities of land alienation, class-conflict and general breakdown of Adivasi lives.[31] Gradually, the performing of tribal dances by the University Department declined, while political mobilization increased. Munda founded his own party to unite the culturalist and Marxist factions. But he always asserted that a cultural agenda was

[31] Susana Devalle, *Discourses of Ethnicity Culture and Protest in Jharkhand* (Delhi: Sage, 1992).

vital for creating a new citizenship in Jharkhand, a citizenship which could have something to offer to the rest of India.

After the creation of Jharkhand state in 2000, the tribalisation of the State was still on the political agenda, and public spaces in Jharkhand were adorned with sculptures of tribal heroes like Sidhu and Kanhu, the chiefs of the Santal rebellion. But I noted that Adivasis, instead of identifying these heroes, would answer simply: "he was a freedom fighter", using the English expression, as if the name of their heroes was confidential and not to be uttered publicly. This inhibition – perceived in everyday interaction – contrasts with what happens at Logo Buru and other ritual events, where participants merge with the past, even as this past makes the Adivasi heritage emerge. After all, the new State represents a political compromise since Adivasis have become a minority due to immigration.

The glorification of the tribal past is not incidental, since leaders such as Shibu Soren are included in the heroic genealogy, through Santal songs which compare him to Mao Tse Tung. The dominant figures of the Jharkhand movement, such as Jaipal Singh,[32] appear in Santal literature, in the company of Fanon, Che Guevara or Trotsky.

[32] The Jharkhand Party was founded in 1951 by Jaipal Singh, a Munda educated at Oxford. Arun Ghosh, *Jharkhand Movement: A Study in the Politics of Regionalism* (Calcutta: Minerva Associates, 1999).

The Forging of an Adivasi Heritage

Santal writers, as actors, claim indigeneity, and appropriate, translate, historicise and read anew cultural symbols and meanings. Tribal literacy appeared in the nineteenth century, through the influence of European missionaries.[33] Since the nineteenth century, a Santali press links the villages with the urban centres. During the last fifty years, many Adivasi conferences have raised the issue of asserting culture through literature. Santal associations and the Santali press, using different scripts, have popularised various forms of literature, ranging from short stories to novels, poetry and village theatre. The Santal elite feels that literature will allow Santals to communicate across the States. They organise annual festivals of literature and theatre to diffuse their writing.

[33] Marine Carrin and Harald Tambs-Lyche, *An Encounter of Peripheries: Santals, Missionaries and Their Changing Worlds, 1867-1900* (Delhi: Manohar, 2008).

Today's Santal literature concerns, and is inspired by, labour conditions, deprivation and protest, and sometimes questions the need for violent action. To recapture subaltern pasts writers evoke myth, to create a glorious version of the past. Santal literature, assertive in its character, aims at countering oppressive historical constructions, like the high-caste mode of defining and interpreting history, which has pushed Adivasis towards the periphery of history. Some writers even try to distance themselves from India and imagine the Santal past rooted in Sumer or Egypt.[34]

[34] Marine Carrin, "The Santal as an Intellectual", in Carrin, Kanungo and Toffin, eds., *The Politics of Ethnicity*, 77-100.

There is no consensus about tribal pasts in India, since these subaltern pasts usually have no records.[35] But reifying and romanticizing tradition may lead to a new nativism. Unlike Western societies with an established 'history' forged by 'modernity', the representations of these communities are rooted in myth, ritual

[35] Saurabh Dube, *Untouchable Pasts, Religion Identity and Power Among a Central Indian Community, 1780-1950,* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

and tradition. To overcome this problem, the subalternist historians have tried to include the past of minorities in the history of the Indian nation. But as Chakrabarty notes, historians cannot write subaltern pasts through their own words or beliefs.[36] He argues that writing Adivasi history is to engage in the future, since subaltern pasts press upon the Indian historian a demand for more democracy. Similarly, when Santal writers evoke the past, they think of the future, of what has to be changed. The question is not what happened during the Santal rebellion in 1855, but why the rebellion is not exhausted by this singular event and why it epitomizes, even today, the idea of Adivasi resistance.

[36] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 2000).

Santal writers, though many are educated and have an urban outlook, consciously invoke indigeneity as a tool to forge Adivasi heritage. Thus Mogla Soren, a retired accountant and a prolific writer, participates in the committee for the pilgrimage to Logo Buru. In the sixties, he founded the Santal Society for dramaturgy, and contributed to the staging of theatre in villages. His main idea, influenced by the period of intensive union activity in Jamshedpur, was to inform villagers of the struggles of steel plant workers. Today, his plays are staged by youth in the villages around Jamshedpur but not in the town itself, though the Tata Company – which has employed Adivasis since the twenties – organizes theatrical activities for its employees. Mogla Soren describes himself as a disciple of Raghunath Murmu, and as a social writer, inspired by Gorki or Tolstoy. Mogla tells me he does not want "to be directly too political" though he stresses the importance of environmental issues. In one play, he stages the story of a father who wants to marry his daughter to a folklorist, doing research on Santal culture. The daughter, though educated in the city, escapes: she is secretly in love with a shepherd from her grandparents' village, which she visits during holidays. The lovers meet near a pure stream which flows from the sacred grove and promise that they will never part. The shepherd, feeling the girl is not for him, after all, tries to commit suicide, but is rescued by the girl. Finally, they are united, since the promise has acted upon them in magical manner. This romantic plot allows the writer to underline the importance of the sacred grove. The return to Santal deities is enshrined in the landscape, something intellectuals like the folklorist, with their school knowledge, cannot grasp.

Mogla Soren is considered as a neo-romantic by younger writers who denounce illegal mining and stage the struggles they are engaged in, facing the repression of the authorities. But neither Mogla, nor his younger colleagues, succeed in staging their plays in Jamshedpur, the steel city where even the romantic evocation of the pristine environment seems dangerous.

Soren stresses that Logo Buru performance is important since it conveys several ideas: the sacredness of the hill, but also the value for Adivasis of marching together and remember the past. He explained that climbing the Logo Buru hill is to unpack Santal narratives about the ancestors, tales still in need of interpretation. In other words, the return to the sacred hill is important to maintain a balance

between practice, through environmental activity, and the message every pilgrim can grasp by looking through the cave. For Mogla Soren, this luring experience of recuperating a loss has been an important inspiration.

Some writers feel the Jharkhand party has failed to deliver the goods, since it is controlled by those in high positions. The more I discussed the more I understood that the Logo Buru performance has an implicit agenda: to enshrine Shibu Soren in the pristine beauty of the hill, as if to purify his image tainted by political scandals. In other words, the real Shibu Soren does not matter: what was important was to associate Logo Buru as a symbol of Adivasi endurance with the leader, as if the latter would be purified by the pilgrimage. The way Shibu Soren was seen at Logo Buru is quite different from the way he was scrutinized when speaking at political rallies. Thus the main character of the Logo Buru performance is the cave itself, able to unite thousands of Santals and non-Santals in a single event.

Voicing Logo Buru

By organizing the Logo Buru performance the writers deploy an Adivasi presence in the cultural field, a presence which is not fortuitous but political. While all cultural acts are not necessarily thought of as tools of resistance, they emancipate Adivasis from the old patronages and cultural politics of the State. During Logo Buru, different ideological trends meet, conveying the message of the Party but also the inner resistance that Adivasis oppose to the Party and the State. Logo Buru as a performance tends to erase inner conflicts which divide the Santals, such as the opposition between Sarna Animist and Christians, a split also found in other indigenous groups in Jharkhand. The performance of indigeneity encompasses a series of ongoing struggles dealing with labour conditions and survival.

The deployment of indigeneity is not limited to environmental issues, and Adivasis want to avoid being romanticised as the guardians of Nature. This has been the strategy of the Hindu Right in Jharkhand, acknowledging Adivasi 'wisdom' while ignoring their economic and political claims. Since the late seventies, the Sarna movement has opposed Hinduisation in the region, but earlier religious reform movements, since the second half of the nineteenth century, have promoted certain Hindu norms and banned traditional practices looked down upon by the Hindu castes.[37]

Santal and Adivasi activists refuse to be trapped in such contradictions: they know that environmental issues are powerful tools which allow them to bridge the gap between ethnicity and regionalism. These issues have contributed to create the political space of Jharkhand where Adivasi populations are emotionally invested in asserting their identity, while pressure on natural resources (forests, mines) have brought dispossession and exploitation.[38]

The Logo Buru performance evokes the spring hunt, which provided youth with the opportunity to learn values associated with masculinity and sociability, as

[37] Marine Carrin, "The Hinduization of the Tribal Indigenous Groups in India", in Knut Jacobsen and Hélène Basu, eds., *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism,* II (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 588-604.

[38] Ajitha Susan George, "The Paradox of Mining and Development", in Nandini Sundar, ed., *Legal Grounds*, *Natural Resources, Identity and the Law in Jharkhand*, (Delhi: Oxford U. P., 2009), 158–88; Stuart Corbridge, "The Ideology of Tribal Economy and Society: Politics in the Jharkhand 1950-1980", *Modern Asian Studies*, 22 (1988), 16-42; Amit Prakash, *Jharkhand: Politics, Development and Identity* (Delhi: Sangam Books, 2010).

well as proper behavior towards senior kin and chiefs.[39] To-day, the staging of the spring hunt is orchestrated by Santal activists, just as the pilgrimage of Logo Buru is organized by Santal writers and politicians. Like Logo buru, the ritual hunt takes place in the forest, and on both occasions, Adivasi men take their bows and arrows. The forest has become the place to perform indigeneity since preserving the environment implies regeneration. Similarly, the sacred grove, symbol of the forest, has helped Adivasis to reinvent Animism. As Chotrae Soren, an old activist, told me: "We should not be ashamed to sacrifice animals to our *bongas*, Australian Aborigenes do the same." Megnath, a Bengali film-maker and former companion of Ram Dayal Munda wants "to document Animism all over the world" in order to "reconciliate Adivasis with themselves".

Concern with Animism is a crucial issue, since Hindus have deliberately polluted sacred groves in the region. In a village of North Odisha where I worked in 2008, the dominant community targeted the sacred grove as "improper" and a retired policeman put pressure on the Santals to worship Hindu gods instead. When the Santals said they might attend Hindu festivals, but still wanted to worship their *bongas*, the policeman made his *goondas* (strongmen) destroy the grove, overturning the sacred stones. He then used his position in the village council to suppress their ration cards, so they could not get subsidised food. Despite the Adivasi leadership, Santals and other indigenous groups are still discriminated since their cultural values are denigrated by non-Adivasis.

Logo Buru as a performance does not directly oppose social outrage but transcends time and space. During Logo Buru, indigeneity is re-conceptualized through pilgrimage to a hill linked to the ancestors, allowing Santals and other Adivasis to evoke muted pasts.

Fig. 1: A picture taken during the pilgrimage.

[39] Andersen, Carrin and Soren, *Rain Fire,* 322-338.

Conclusion: Performing Indigeneity

The politics of representation staged by Santals aims at particular representations of culture, sociality and territory, as we see from Logo Buru, or else the ritual hunt. Santal writers return to the sacred grove as a source of inspiration, and Adivasis have earned the official acknowledgement of the grove as a place of worship, according to the *Indian Temple Act*. When Ram Dayal Munda told me that indigenous people could be saved by dance he wanted to assert the visibility of Adivasi culture in Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand.

Mogla Soren, quoting Tolstoy, told me the village still has a strong appeal. In contrast, towns are seen as places where Adivasis are invisible, despite their presence in Jharkhand's main cities. More recently Adivasi film makers have produced video clips showing how Adivasi youth with degrees are hanging around, unemployed, in the cities. Towns, then, are not a place of empowerment for Adivasis, save for a few politicians, and so Logo Buru takes place in the forest, from where Adivasi identities can be "authenticated". Certainly, the public presence of indigenous intellectuals has successfully forced a rethinking of the notion of indigeneity. This is particularly true of Ram Dayal Munda, who developed cultural initiatives in Jharkhand, while simultaneously being a delegate to the meeting of Indigenous People in Geneva. As a politician, Munda could merge transnational strategies of identity production with political mobilization within and beyond the indigenous label.

Santal writers are influential in Logo Buru but we should note that their writing is adapted to village theatre, and transformed by villagers themselves, who are also actors. Thus literature and village theatre become experiences of entextualization, defined by Silverstein and Urban as "a process of rendering a certain instance of discourse as text, detachable from its local context". The entextualized discourse thus becomes an object in itself, like a quotation from the Bible or the Constitution, for example. As an entextualized object it gains a meaning that transcends context, thus allowing for its performative function.[40] Entextualization, in the Santal context, means that elements pertaining to myth or ritual speech, which may concern the *Cae Champa* kingdom, the ancestors, the forest or the sacred grove, are stitched together in a performance such as Logo Buru.

[40] Mikael Silverstein and Greg Urban, eds., *Natural Histories of Discourse* (Chicago: Chicago U. P., 1996), 21.

The Santals have reconfigured their identity by promoting the Sarna Dhorom movement and by staging the pilgrimage to Logo Buru, thus articulating religious ideas, indigenous knowledge and environmental politics. Subaltern societies gain more visibility when their conflicts are reinterpreted in the context of identity movements, enhancing Adivasi articulation of community consciousness related to recognition claims. Adivasi subjectivity being multiple, the historical and the ideological is coordinated in a dialogue by assuming that indigeneity is a relevant concept for Adivasi struggles. Adivasis must counteract the denial they face, in terms of religion, identity and rights. As in the example of Adivasi schools,

indigeneity is often unmade, and thus needs to be reconstructed.

Performance "makes things stick" says Barber, showing how African praise poetry is transformed in the context of utterance.[41] Does the performance of indigeneity help Adivasis to gain visibility and thus feel they are part of civil society? Literature, dance, pilgrimages, ritual hunt and commemorations are not insignificant in a context where mainstream ideology tries to appropriate the folk or the tribal. They provide the necessary counterpoised figure of "the other" in the construction of the Indian nation.

[41] Karin Barber, "Improvisations and the Art of Making Things Stick", in Elisabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold, eds., *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation* (ASA Monographs 44, 2007), 31.