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Out of Hidden India.
Adivasi Histories, Stories, Visual Arts and Performances

Edited by Rossella Ciocca and Sanjukta Das Gupta

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Rossella Ciocca and Sanjukta Das Gupta

Introduction. Out of Hidden India: Adivasi Histories, Stories, Visual Arts and Performances

This issue of *Anglistica AION* is dedicated to indigenous India and to some of its forms of emerging subjectivity. After having been studied by ethno-anthropologists as cultural exceptions or worse after having embodied the stereotype of the 'born offender'[1] in colonial legislation, Indian tribals are claiming a new articulated visibility and an amplified political resonance. As Rashmi Varma[2] remarks, in post-independence India, tribals are emerging as political protagonists in their own right asking, and in part obtaining, attention and recognition. Unfortunately even in the postcolonial state tribals continue to suffer from an easy mis-representation of their role and status, figuring very often as dangerous insurgents who threaten national security or as backward minorities whose survival hinders development.

Contemporary imaginings of Adivasis have been significantly influenced by the colonial discourse on tribe. As in colonial writings, so in the discourses of contemporary indigenous resistance Adivasis are represented as the 'primitive other'[3] and the image of the primitive savage tribe prone to violent resistance remains embedded in the 'mainstream' thinking in India. Indeed, most histories of Adivasis, till recently, tended to be restricted to histories of rebellions, a colonial legacy whereby attention would be focused on tribal communities only at particular moments of unrest, as a backdrop for the counter-insurgency measures of the colonial state. Nonetheless, the hitherto invisible tribal has today emerged as a subject of historical research. The essays in this special issue of Anglistica grapple with some of these concerns relating to Adivasi pasts and the present.

Approximately 8.2% of India's population are today classified as 'Scheduled Tribes'.[4] Introduced during colonial times, the term 'tribe' with its implications of backwardness, geographical isolation, simple technology and primitivism is problematic. Yet, going against global trends, the term with its evolutionist connotations persists in India, being validated and given a legal status by the Constitution. In everyday parlance, however, the word commonly used is Adivasi, which in most languages of north India indicates 'original inhabitants' of a given place. In recent years, the notions of indigeneity, and of indigenous people, are also emphasized by scholars and activists who shun the cultural baggage of 'tribe'. While such notions are often used coterminously, these have, as Karlsson and

[1] The reference is of course to the various pieces of legislation, known under the name of *Criminal Tribes Act*, enforced by the British Colonial Rule in 1871, 1876, 1911, 1924. Under the various versions of the Act, whole communities were defined "habitually criminal" and subjected to restriction of movement and other forms of police control.

[2] Rashmi Varma, "Primitive Accumulation: The Political Economy of Indigenous Art in Postcolonial India", *Third Text*, 27.6 (2013), 748-761, 750.

[3] Crispin Bates and Alpa Shah, eds., "Introduction", *Savage Attack: Tribal Insurgency in India* (Delhi: Social Science Press, 2014), 2.

[4] According to the Census of India, 2011, the population of the Scheduled Tribes totalled 84, 326, 240.

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Subba remind us, very distinct genealogies.[5] However, what is common to the varied terminology is the sense of a community distinct from that of the Hindu and Muslim mainstream in the subcontinent.

This idea of cultural distinction arises partly from the colonial categorizations of the conquered populations, whereby tribes were identified as primitive, savage and backward and, therefore, vulnerable to the depradations of 'outsiders' against whom protection was afforded by the colonial government. Such categorizations also served as part of the colonial 'legitimizing ideology' which tended to stereotype and reify diverse social groups into fixed entities and rigid identities. Some scholars have thus interpreted tribe as a 'colonial category, ahistorical and sociologically groundless',[6] a 'product of colonial theories and practices' rather than a 'continuation' of 'Indian practices'.[7] They also point out that Indian languages have no equivalent for the term tribe[8] and that in pre-colonial India ethnic communities had fuzzy boundaries which did not admit of discrete divisions.[9]

Critiquing the over-emphasis on the 'imagined' nature of caste, tribe and other identities as a 'post-colonial essentializing', other scholars have underscored the role of indigenous agency in this respect. Together with 18th and 19th century European notions of race, they argue, colonial epistemology also drew upon Brahmanical values and notions.[10] In fact 'tribes' may well be considered to be a Brahmanical construct rather than merely a colonial one, since, to be linked to the wilderness or the jungle had been considered pejorative since ancient times in India.[11] Above all, as historically determined social groups, such communities had longer histories in course of which they derived their own specific attributes.[12]

As opposed to colonial assertions of cultural distinction, anthropologists, since the early 20th century, have highlighted the fact of cultural contacts between 'caste' and 'tribe'. Ghurye, for instance, believed that the indigenous peoples of India whom he defined as 'Backward Hindus' had always been part of mainstream Hindu culture.[13] Nationalist-minded anthropologists also laid emphasis on the notion of acculturation[14] or the 'tribe-caste continuum'.[15] Similarly, Béteille questions if 'tribe' can be perceived as a distinct structural type and rejects the idea of tribe-peasant bipolarity.[16]

In contemporary academic discourse 'Adivasi' has emerged as a widely-accepted term.[17] As Hardiman notes, the term is of relatively recent coinage, appearing in Chotanagpur in 1930s and later popularized by the social worker A.V. Thakkar in the 1940s.[18] To Hardiman, Adivasis are social groups who 'have evolved a collective identity of *being* Adivasi [emphasis added]' through their common fate under colonial rule.[19] Yet, 'Adivasi' with its inherent sense of 'original settlement' does not find acceptance in a pan-Indian context. People in the 'Sixth Schedule' areas of north-east India prefer 'Scheduled Tribe'. It is in the 'Fifth Schedule'[20] areas of central India that 'Adivasi' has emerged as a politically assertive category indicating a section of the indigenous people of India, who together with the Dalit form the marginalized communities of India.

[5] Bengt G. Karlsson and Tanka B. Subba, eds., *Indigeneity in India* (London: Kegan Paul 2006), 1-9.

[6] Susana B.C. Devalle, *Discourses of Ethnicity: Culture and Protest in Jharkhand* (New Delhi: Sage, 1992), 50. Also see Virginius Xaxa, *State, Society and Tribes: Issues in Post-Colonial India* (Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2008).

[7] Ajay Skaria, "Shades of Wildness: Tribes, Caste and Gender in Western India", *Journal of Asian Studies*, 56.3, (1997) 730.

[8] Jagannath Pathy, *Anthropology of Development: Demystifications and Relevance* (New Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1987), 46.

[9] Sudipta Kaviraj, "On the Construction of Colonial Power: Structure, Discourse, Hegemony", in *The Imaginary Institution of India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010), 56; Dipesh Chakravarty, "Governmental Roots of Modern Ethnicity", in *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002), 87; Sumit Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India, 1200-1901* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1999).

[10] Vinita Damodaran, "Colonial Constructions of the 'Tribe' in India: the Case of Chotanagpur", in Biswamoy Pati, ed., *Adivasis in Colonial India: Survival, Resistance and Negotiation* (Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011), 58; Rosalind O' Hanlon, "Cultures of Rule, Communities of Resistance: Gender Discourse and Resistance in Recent South Asian Historiographies", *Social Analysis*, Vol. 25 (1989), 99.

[11] Binay B. Chaudhuri, "*Adivasi* and *Aranyaka*: Reconsidering Some Characterizations of their Polity and Economy in Pre-colonial and Colonial India", in Binay Bhusan Chaudhuri and Arun Bandopadhyay, eds., *Tribes, Forest and Social Formation in Indian History (*Delhi: Manohar, 2004), 89-90.

[12] Sanjukta Das Gupta, *Adivasis and the Raj: Socio-economic Transition of the Hos, 1820-1932* (Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011), 10-11.

[13] Govind S. Ghurye, *The Scheduled Tribes* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1995).

[14] See for instance, Dhirendra Nath Majumdar, *A Tribe in Transition: A Study in Culture Patterns* (Calcutta: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1937); Id., *The Affairs of a Tribe: A Study in Tribal Dynamics* (Lucknow: Universal Publishers, 1950).

[15] The tribe-caste continuum derives partly from colonial understandings of 'tribe', notably from Herbert H. Risley's *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Firma KLM 1981 [1892]). Risley highlighted the change in the tribal world through the process of emulation of Hindu cultural norms, particularly the Rajput-*kshatriya* model. Nirmal Kumar Bose, "The Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption", *Science and Culture*, Vol. 7 (1941), 188-194; Surajit Sinha, "State Formation and Rajput Myth in Tribal Central India", *Man in India*, Vol. XLII (1962).

Referring to themselves as first inhabitants, Adivasis stress their being not just 'forest dwellers' ('vanvasi')[21] but national and trans-national[22] subjects who vindicate a 'border' citizenship distinct from the majoritarian organized forms of social and cultural identities. The term *adivāsi,* is thus increasingly acquiring a series of cultural and political meanings all of which tend to discuss, and often disturb, both the logic of liberal nationalist citizenship and more recently also the Indian process of neoliberal globalization. At the crossroads of postcolonial and subaltern studies, indigenous political theory is indeed fostering new possible subject positions from which to dialogue with social and economic modernity. At the same time peculiar difficulties and aporias are there to be faced. Modernity, with its corollary of universal humanity, has traditionally posed a constitutive connection between the categories of life, ownership, and liberty, locating at the heart of the onto-epistemologies of the subject formation the link between property and civil rights. Being and having, in liberal modernity have ontologically entailed each other. As Butler and Athanasiou have efficaciously epitomized, in globally framed modernity "being is defined as having; having is constructed as an essential prerequisite of the proper human being".[23] How to theoretically relate then to a version of *alter* modernity in which life and freedom are not based on land and property ownership? How do peoples who define themselves in terms of free access to natural resources, place-based solidarities, communitarian knowledges and institutions, and religious interaction with wildlife and landscape, articulate their subjectivity in a contemporaneity by now also locally dominated by global capitalism and developmental ideas of progress?

Indeed the inescapable question of indigenous constitutive difference defy any simple attempt to politicize a demand for equal rights, a demand which is strictly intertwined with the first claim of all, the claim to dissimilarity, to not being just absorbed and incorporated, economically in corporate developmental schemes and socially, via a process of induced Hinduization, in the majoritarian caste order of Indian society.[24]

From this tension a complex series of contradictions spring usually out. As Jody A. Byrd and Michael Rothberg for example highlight: "indigenous difference is identified and recognized, but only in order to be translated into a language commensurable with the very state that is structured on the disenfranchisement of fundamental indigenous claims".[25] While the classic liberal theory would have the subaltern included within the social frame of the modern democratic state, the combination of subalternity with indigeneity challenges indeed the possibility to coherently reconcile the rights of the individual with those pursued by highly emphasized group identities. But tribal claims, albeit not easily reconcilable with the dominant models of liberal democracy, are nonetheless at the heart of a struggle not only for justice and empowerment but more often than not also for mere survival. As in post-liberalization India, traditional areas of tribal settlements are becoming key-sites of infrastructural modernization, indigeneous groups are

[16] André Béteille, *Six Essays in Comparative Sociology* (Delhi: Oxford U. P., 1974), chs. 3-4.

[17] For details see, Daniel J. Rycroft and Sangeeta Dasgupta, "Indigenous Pasts and Politics of belonging", in Daniel J. Rycroft and Sangeeta Dasgupta, eds., *The Politics of Belonging in India: Becoming Adivasi* (London and NewYork: Routledge, 2011) 1-16; Sanjukta Das Gupta and Raj Sekhar Basu, eds., "Introduction", *Narratives from the Margins: Aspects of Adivasi History in India* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2012), 1-16.

[18] David Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India* (Delhi: Oxford U. P., 1987), 13-15. Hardiman was one of the first scholars to privilege 'Adivasi' over to 'tribe', as it relates to 'a particular historical development' of the 'subjection of a wide variety of communities during the 19th century', which, before the colonial period, had remained relatively free from the control of outside states. See, David Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India* (Delhi: Oxford U. P., 1987).

[19] Ibid. 16.

[20] The Fifth [Article 244(1)] and Sixth [Articles 244(2) and 275(1)] Schedules of the Indian Constitution provide a degree of protection to Scheduled Tribes. The Fifth Schedule areas are included within the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Orissa and Rajasthan, while those of the Sixth Schedule include the autonomous districts in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura and Sikkim.

[21] The ideological project of right-wing nationalism to claim for Hindus the exclusive status of original inhabitants, functional to the idea of a homogeneous Hindu nation, implies the recasting of Adivasis as just woodland dwellers (*vanvasis*).

[22] This is particularly true in the Northeast where tribal groups inhabit cross-border areas. See on this Sanjib Baruah, *Postfrontier Blues: Toward a New Policy Framework for Northeast India* (Washington: East-West Center, 2007).

[23] Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (London: Polity, 2013), 13.

[24] While in theory tribes and castes represent divergent cultural conceptions and different modes of civil organization, in many areas of the country, social contact and cultural pressures have often induced tribal groups to transform into scheduled castes in order to obtain social and political recognition.

[25] Jody A. Byrd and Michael Rothberg, "Between Subalternity and Indigeneity", *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 13.1 (2011), 1-12, 7.

increasingly displaced to less hospitable environs or deprived of their customary access to communitarian resources and progressively dispossessed of their cultural heritage and undergoing a process of economic empoverishment and cultural destitution. This process, defined by Rob Nixon of slow violence:[26] a violence which occurs gradually and out of sight because perpetrated in remote areas without media coverage, is affecting the majority of tribal Indian communities and generating an emergential state of affairs.

[26] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge and London: Harvard U. P., 2011).

Indigenous peoples thus represent a major paradox in South Asian modernity. Their different ethos in inhabiting the planet and their place-based system of knowledges is recognized, in theory, as a preciuos kind of 'cultural capital', actualizing on a national scale the Nerhuvian legacy of unity-in-diversity and providing, in transnational movements, valuable ecological alternatives to the degradations of exploitative forced-growth. In reality the process of land grabbing and displacement, begun under the aegis of the colonial 'Land Acquisition Act' (1894), has in liberalized India esponentially increased in order to create technologically developed 'Special Economic Zones' (SEZ) in which the laws of state protection and respect of civil rights are altogether suspended.[27] Thus state discourses and legislative actions on tribal welfare and civilizational autonomy remain largely dead letter.

[27] See on this also Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 6.

The aim of this current issue of Anglistica is, however tentatively, to engage the question of the role of Adivasis in Indian modernity, the possibility, and their actual efforts, to vindicate a right to existence, cultural rootedness, and geographical locatedness. It has been particularly helpful in this number to take advantage of the Journal's interdisciplary character to construe a critical platform of conversant disciplinary formations, spanning historical and social sciences, literary criticism, anthropology, media and artistic studies. Cultural forms of activism have in any case gained a privileged perspective both in terms of documented experiences and as a pervasive conceptual frame. Problematic as it is to bring together under the label Adivasi a very heterogeneous corpus of cultural and political manifestations, the editors, in assembling the materials of this issue, have aimed at accruing to the critical archive of Indian tribal condition. By means of historiographical reconstructions, cultural analyses and reflections on artistic forms of resistance, they have intended to contribute, however partially, to the mapping of an enlarged Adivasi visibility.

Divided into four main chapters of discourse, the Journal hosts a first section devoted to forms *from the field* of "cultural activism and ecocritical perspectives". In this section the first contribution is by Felix Padel, an anthropologist-activist and a strong promoter of tribal and village-community rights. Padel lives in India and has been engaged in activist struggles against mega-industrial assaults on natural ecosystems, especially those entailed by big dams. In his article "Ecocritical perspectives on Adivasi destiny. Past, present and Ancient Future?", Padel laments

the destructive impact of a 'development' which regularly means the takeover of Adivasi lands, with no real policies of replacement or rehabilitation, and the transformation of men and women into bonded and sexual labourers, while the militarization of tribal areas is transforming their life in a perennial 'state of exception'. Even at the risk of inflecting the discourse about indigeneity with forms of nativism, Padel strongly advocates the role of Adivasis as the representative of India's most ancient cultures and possible desirable future. Seeing them as the preserver of the strongest set of nature-respecting values, which can be summarized as 'deep ecology' – "an economy based on ecological principles, of living lightly on the land and minimising private property" – his hope is that the miopic injustice which sees Adivasis' habitats destroyed will start to be inverted inducing mainstream society to learn instead from ancient tribal reverence for nature's prerogatives and their techniques of long-term sustainability.

Shifting from ecocritical emphasis to a cultural-performative key, in "Beyond Cultural Aphasia" Rossella Ciocca presents a conversation with Ganesh Devy, founder, together with Laxman Gaikwad and Mahasweta Devi, of 'The Denotified and Nomadic Tribes Rights Action Group'. Devy, who can boast a longlife engagement in the field of tribal languages' and cultures' conservation, is also the initiator and director of the *Adivasi Academy* at Tejgadh (Gujarat) specifically established to create an educational environment for tribals. In his many books and campaigns he has denounced local and central responsibilities in marginalizing indigenous people through the systematic, and often illegal, alienation of their lands and livelihood in the name of progress. The conversation touches all the main issues concerning the condition of Adivasis in India today from British colonial legacy to the internal colonialism of the central state; from the threats posed by Naxalism on the one hand and the so-called process of Sanskritization, on the other; from the limits of affirmative action to the most insidious forms of economic exploitation. But Devy's emphasis is, coherently with his action, on language as an identity marker and fundamental enhancer of groups' and cultures' survival. Devy has always interpreted his commitment in defense of Adivasis as a struggle against silence and aphasia not only to preserve their traditional systems of knowledge, their cultures and worldviews but also to let their agency emerge through new articulations of their voice and stance. Pointing at the various kinds of artistic, cinematic, theatrical forms of tribal expression, Devy believes in the capacity of these to help endangered communities to articulate new empowered subjectivities and transform their predicament into creative and political energy.

In the following section, entitled "Between Rite and Art. Performing Languages of Indigeneity", the cultural activism sponsored by Devy finds a manifold range of possible enactment. Different expressive and creative languages are here analysed in their common performative articulation of tribal identity, providing different ways of answering the same need of devising a cultural strategy not only for survival but also for affirmative action. Marine Carrin, in "Performing Indigeneity

on a Sacred Hill, Logo Buru" deals with specific forms of ritualized actions serving as metaphors of identity. Indeed, in the last decades, many Adivasi groups have committed themselves to reframing and performing their festivals to enhance the visibility of their culture and to express environmental and political concerns. Arguing that some dimensions of displayed indigeneity aim at challenging marginalization by rendering the present meaningful in relation to an idealized past, Carrin interprets the participation to the *Logo Buru* pilgrimage as the possibility to re-enact principles and events deeply embedded in the formation of the tribal state of Jharkhand, created in 2000. The article shows how the performance enables Adivasis to transmute memory work into a powerful trope of political visibility, linking religious and symbolic values which operate at the very local level to the wider agenda of the regional state.

From the tribal reality of Jharkhand, Mara Matta moves to another predominantly tribal, as much as periferic, area, to explore the poetics and politics of representation of the indigenous people inhabiting the border regions of the Northeast. The tribal hills that constitute an important part of the so-called *Seven Sisters*, have lately seen an emerging output of creative forms of storytelling mostly in literary and in cinematic shapes. As Margaret Ch. Zama rightly argues "changing times and its accompanying dynamics have necessitated the various communities of this region to seek new ways to negotiate, translate and expose their world views."[28] And thus, mapping the transition from oral culture to written forms of self-expression, Matta chooses, in her article "The *Khasi New Wave*: Addressing Indigenous Issues from a Literary and Cinematic Perspective", to analyse *19/87*, a *Khasi* language film drawn by a previous short story on the same topics. Set in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, both the film by Diengdoh and Lyngdoh and the short story by Pariat represent a new aesthetic and stylistic research to combine artistic experimentation with social commitment. Addressing sensitive identifiers such as religion, ethnicity, belonging and the alien condition of the migrant, *19/87* aims at framing a new understanding of the ethnic fabric and the interethnic economy of relationships in the region. In particular, deconstructing the artificial idea of a pure *khasiness*, where those who allegedly 'do-not-belong' are constantly placed in a critical position, the story tackles the highly politicized dichotomy at the root of recurring conflicts in Meghalaya between tribal and non-tribal groups.

Tehezeeb Moitra, in "*Terra Firma* and Fluid Spaces: Warli painting from the Neolithic to the Postmodern" shifts the critical focus to another kind of tribal language at once traditional and experimental which is finding expanding attention not only in art museums and galleries, but in the world of fashion and even in merchandising. Warli painting, as Moitra explains, was eponymously linked to the Warlis, an Adivasi tribe from the Thane district of India. Traditionally connected to ritual practice, this art took a radical turn when, in the the Seventies, Warlis started to paint for pleasure and on an increasingly regular basis, obtaing the attention of art galleries and social organizations. In her article Moitra is interested in assessing

[28] Margaret Ch. Zama, ed., *Emerging Literatures from Northeast India: The Dynamics of Culture*, Society and Identity (New Delhi: Sage, 2013), XII.

the implications in the last decades of this process of recontextualization. Addressing various questions pertaining to the changed condition of an uninstitutionalized ancient art form translated and disseminated into an institutionalized and, at the same time, also highly commercialized global art market, the discourse questions the possible degradation of its artistic status and the loss of its cultural authenticity. But departing from accounts that see indigenous art as univocally defiled and devalued by commercialization, Moitra interrogates the possibility instead of navigating the shaking terrain upon which binaries are transcended and objects undergo processes of re-configuration and reconceptualization. Following the ways by which, no longer tied to the site of its original physical landscape, Warli art has been imported from the local to the global arena, the essay explores this tribal art's dialogue with the world and also its new role in promoting Adivasi economic and cultural forms of empowerment and awareness.

In the last contribution of this section, indigeneity is reframed in gender terms and in relation to old and new forms of colonialism. Taking his cue from Spivak's, by now classic, 'standpoint theory', Giuseppe De Riso, in "Of Smoke and Mirrors: Adivasi Women in Post-Colonial India" re-addresses the question of the danger of speaking *for* Adivasis instead of speaking *to* Adivasis or being able to listen to them when they speak. In analysing two short stories by Mahasweta Devi, *Draupadi* and *Behind the Bodice*, the latter recently transposed into a movie, *Gangor*, by the Italian director Italo Spinelli, De Riso reflects on the fact that, like the subaltern, the indigenous too can fall victim not only to an objective difficulty of articulating one's voice but also to the concurrent lack of hearing, or worse substantial mishearing, on the part of the intellectual. The attention not so much to the tribal failed act of communication as to the much more pernicious and full of dire consequences act of failed reception and misappropriation of tribal voices by the elite, is central in Devi's stories. In De Riso's reading both Draupadi and Gangor, the two female tribal protagonists who are victims of a terrible violence, which is at once male and colonial as well as male and postcolonial or neocolonial, are nonetheless able to somehow challenge and disparage the official epistemological regime of truth providing, with the language of their raped and twisted bodies, an act of revelation and denouement which renders evident and eloquent what was meant to remain unvisible and speechless.

In the subsequent section, "Exploring Gender Politics" the focus shifts to the tensions and contestations implicit in gender relations within Adivasi societies. Taking a long-term view spanning the colonial and the postcolonial periods, two related essays analyse the historical situation of Adivasi women in the Chotonagpur region in Jharkhand. The first article "Custom, rights and identity: Adivasi women in Eastern India" by Sanjukta Das Gupta draws attention to the contentious issue of land ownership as a marker of women's status in patrilineal Adivasi societies of eastern, central India which today involves questions ranging from Adivasi cultural

identity to strategies to fight social and economic deprivation. Challenging conventional arguments which held British colonialism responsible for the erosion of Adivasi women's rights, Das Gupta offers a more nuanced reading of the impact of colonialism from a historical standpoint. The major Adivasi communities of Jharkhand, even before colonial times, followed ritualized patrilineal forms of land inheritance where women were excluded. The British in their pursuit of legal homogeneity attempted to identify tribal customs, often resulting in the restructuring of tradition. This, on the one hand led certain sections of Adivasi society, both men and women, to actively claim women's hereditary right to land ownership in the colonial courts. On the other hand, greater exposure to exploitation by market forces and growing economic marginalization under colonial rule resulted in the weakening of traditional communal organizations and an overall restriction of women's entitlements. In postcolonial India, continuing land alienation has further increased women's vulnerability, and the fundamentalist discourse has simultaneouly advocated the suppression of women's rights in the name of social harmony. Adivasi politics of identity also tends to represent women's land rights as a threat to the 'traditional' tribal social order. Various forms of social ostracism have thus been adopted to control 'deviant' women asserting their rights.

The question of the need to control 'deviant' women is further explored by Shashank S. Sinha in his article "Culture of Violence or Violence of Cultures? Adivasis and Witch-hunting in Chotanagpur", which analyses the nature and structure of violence related to witch-hunting from around 1850s to present times. Observing that the practice of witchcraft was almost exclusive to patrilineal agricultural communities while being absent among the nomadic foraging communities, Sinha identifies the colonial regime of the late 19th and early 20th centuries as the defining moment in this history. This was the period when witch-hunting became linked with the extension of colonial politics, legislation and justice into the region and he further emphasizes the role of Christian missionaries, ethnographers and anthropologists in this respect. Highlighting the gendered nature of victimhood, Sinha analyses the structure of such violence, its multiple meanings and its dynamic nature. He identifies certain radical changes in the recent past during which witchcraft accusations have become intrinsically associated with landgrabbing. Moreover, there has been an expansion in the territoriality of witch-hunts which today may encompass entire population, both Adivasi and non-Adivasi (including Dalits and Muslims), within the village. Another significant change is the sexualization of such violence and the public spectacles of humilation and shaming.

The final section entitled "Re-assessing colonial and postcolonial histories and anthropologies" traces certain aspects of Adivasi colonial history and the postcolonial present. In his essay on "Interpreting the Santal Rebellion: From 1855 till the End of the Nineteenth Century" Peter B. Andersen analyses the differing

interpretations of the Santal rebellion by Santals, colonial writers and contemporary social scientists in the second half of the 19th century, revisiting the methodological debate on the distinction between tribal and non-tribal movements. While Ranajit Guha, in his classic *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*[29] included tribal rebellion within his category of 'peasant insurgencies', other scholars argued that this tended to gloss over the diversities of tribal social existence. To Andersen, Guha's study is an example of how the ideology and discursive character of postcolonial enquiries have ignored a set of historical evidence regarding the Santal rebellion and prevented 'a full-fledged investigation of the social circumstances of events.' He illustrates his arguments with significant historical sources earlier ignored, such as Santal oral records and later reminiscences (which stress on the religious and moral element in the motivation and failure of the rebellion), archival sources and British writers of various periods and degrees of sympathy (those under East India Company were most critical, while those under the British Crown, like Hunter, more understanding), and a later account by a Hindu landlord (in an ambiguous relation to colonial power and the rebellion). These sources found no adequate space within Guha's three-layered notion of the 'prose of counter-insurgency'. There were different ideas among Santals about how to 'respond morally and strategically to challenges from the outside'. In the colonial world too, there were different responses to the rebellion depending on the ideologies and interests of specific groups. Andersen thus presents a more complicated reading of the Santal uprising.

[29] Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford U. P., 1983).

The theme of Adivasi rebellion also forms the backdrop of Daniel J. Rycroft's article, "Locating Adivasi Politics: Aspects of 'Indian' Anthropology after Birsa Munda", in which he demonstrates how the anthropological reformulation of the Mundas' past became linked up with India's national future in the second and third decades of the 20th century. This period witnessed the integration of Adivasis in national aspirations and 'time' by an emerging national anthropology. Thus, he argues, after 1912, Birsa Munda became a heroic 'intermediation' figure between nation and tribes which entailed resolving a series of 'inter-cultural complexities'. 'Indian anthropology' produced histories of inter-cultural exchange where local communities gradually integrated within the national collectivity to bridge the old and new: tribes and nation. These 'intersections' between scholarship, the culture of modern/national/human evolution and politics influenced the Indian National Congress to actively involve in 'Birsa-oriented activities' within a national framework in the 1930s. Visual arts, such as Maharathi's portrait of Birsa, specially contributed to Birsa's public image as the divine hero of an 'elevated dharma' (signifying national progress), and proposed a new aesthetic of social integration through alternative, 'post-primitive' perceptions of Adivasis. Birsa's images were circulated to represent sites of national resistance, the 'prospective citizens' of India, and its ethnic communities and traditions. Colonial administration, shifting from the anti-Munda attitude of the years of the *Ulugulan*,[30] to post-insurgency

[30] The 'Great Tumult' or the Munda revolt of 1898-1900 which took place near Ranchi in Jharkhnd.

protectionism and interest in Munda's *khuntkatti* system of land rights, also contributed to draw attention to and legitimize Munda ancestral heritage, culminating in the incorporation of anthropological epistemology into the Government of India Act. Rycroft avers that Sarat Chandra Roy, anthropologist and legal adviser to the government, was the link between the 'material' colonial archive as 'a closed entity', and the 'metaphorical' archive of the nation as 'a site of release, liberation, or future empowerment'.

How have Adivasis fared in the six decades of democracy and development in postcolonial India? Unlike Dalits, as Ramachandra Guha points out, Adivasis grievances have not been effectively articulated in the democratic processes.[31] Amit Prakash *et al* provide an answer to this through analysing the 'dialectical evolution' of governance of the 'resistant world' of the Adivasis of contemporary Jharkhand in the article "Homogenising discourses of governance: Identity and autonomy in Jharkhand." While the rationality of governance in India had been to secure the welfare of different categories of the population, contestations over resource-sharing and the politics of development created obstacles in the implementation of redistributive policies. The functioning of Indian democracy, they argue, is based upon a broad discursive consensus across multiple political actors encompassing the principles of state security, democracy and development, and ensuring social justice. Prakash *et al* demonstrate how this consensus has been, and is, negotiated at various levels of governance. The rise of radical Naxalism since the 1970s constituted the most signficant threat to 'state-security' in Jharkhand, and was facilitated by the inadequate grassroots governance structures and perceived neglect and injustice among the Adivasi people of the region. The authors argue that there exists a complex, negotiated consensus between these Naxal units and the indigenous elite controlling the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI), i.e, the institutions of local self-government. PRIs at the village-level form the thrust of the research of Prakash and his team of researchers who have undertaken extensive field studies in the state of Jharkhand to study the local functioning of democracy. Despite developmental funding in Naxal-effected areas, policy objectives, they point out, are seldom realized. On the positive side, PRIs increase inclusivity and participatory politics, but they lack autonomy in the choice of policies. In conclusion they state that while the governance processes do manifest stability and a degree of discursive coherence, yet this very stability results in a slow pace of social change.

In the final article of this issue, "The end of time *in* Adivasi traditions or the Time of the End *for* the Adivasi traditions?", the social anthropologist Stefano Beggiora relates Adivasi ideas regarding the 'end of time' to 'major classical traditions of the subcontinent'. To him, the real issue today is an approaching 'time of the end' for Adivasis, despite the fact that any sustainable development for the future of mankind should take indigenous culture as a 'paradigmatic starting point'. He identifies several threats to Adivasi lifestyle, ranging from the policies of

[31] Ramachandra Guha, "Adivasis, Naxalites and Indian Democracy", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42.32 (August 11, 2007), 3305-3312.

economic development implemented by Central and state governments, the fight of the Indian state against Naxalism – together with its corollaries (Maoism, Salwa Judum, Operation Green Hunt, the 'Wham' policy), the rise of large metropolitan centres and the right-wing Hindutva ideological thrust towards cultural homogenization. Beggiora further traces the extant ideas of 'End of Time' within Adivasi cultures and 'tribal shamanism'. In course of 15 years of field research and study of oral traditions, he observed certain common traits of such ideas based on three premises: that end leads to regeneration, that the focus is on material and not on metaphysical theory, and, that messianism and eschatology as attributed to contemporary Adivasi movements are due to a 'misinterpretation of indigenous cultures'. Highlighting the continuity between Adivasis, Hinduism and Buddhism, he further argues that such ideas are related to cosmogonic myths of Space and Time in India's indigenous traditions and are a source of identity for Adivasi communities.

Adopting an inter-disciplinary approach with diverse disciplinary methodologies and subjectivities, this *Anglistica* issue aims at bringing 'hidden India' – as opposed to the celebrated 'New India' – into academic visibility. The essays draw out the complex historical and contemporary specificities of Adivasi life experiences and we editors hope that it will contribute to further academic research and discussions.

Felix Padel

Ecocritical Perspectives on Adivasi Destiny. Past Present and Ancient Future?

Abstract: Adivasi culture is the essence of hidden India. Tribal people represent India's most ancient cultures, and preserve the strongest set of nature-respecting values, which can be summarised as 'deep ecology' – an economy based on ecological principles, of living lightly on the land and minimising private property, with strong emphasis on co-operation and labour exchange. British rule brought huge iniquities, and Adivasis rebelled again and again against the scarlet or khaki uniforms and unjust laws that alienated the forest from those who had always lived in and around it. Independent India has continued the same power structures in a system of 'internal colonialism', enforcing a vast scale of dispossession. Adivasis' present condition is then extremely harsh, as patterns of exploitation and outsider-domination have escalated to extreme levels of dispossession and marginalisation. Mining projects and metal factories are invading tribal lands, big dams are drowning them, and a hideous civil war in the areas of eastern and central India is enlisting Tribal people on both sides. Adivasi culture offers a vision of true, long-term sustainability and survival, but as communities are displaced and split between left and right, the human suffering escalates, and the way ahead is opaque. What will be the future destiny of Adivasis?

Keywords: *deep ecology, civil war, past, future, development*

Adivasi culture is the essence of hidden India, or 'the other India'. The ancient tribal or indigenous cultures, attuned over countless generations to a softly moulded, sensitively managed landscape, represent a vast continuity with ancient India. But rather than seeing them as 'the past', what if they also represent India's future? In terms of living sustainably on the land, without a doubt, they are ahead of the game.

In British times, 'the little Gond with his axe' is at the centre of Kipling's *Jungle Stories* – a hidden centre, barely visible. Even today, Adivasi culture barely figures in the consciousness of India's urban middle classes, or for tens of thousands of tourists who visit India, or even for most indigenous people in New Zealand or throughout the continent of America, who rarely hear about India's Adivasis and their urgent issues. Beyond the stereotyped language of journalism or academia, tribal India, with its complex linguistic, ritual, political and ecological systems of knowledge and practices, is still there, hidden from general awareness by a leafy canopy of remoteness and colonial-era prejudice. But also by the harsh modern realities of extreme poverty, injustice, and a system of endemic exploitation.

Part of the problem is that we do not hear Adivasi voices. It is not that Adivasis do not speak. Often they are super-articulate. But who listens? Commercial media has in-built forms of hierarchy and censorship. To hear Adivasis speak openly and

confidently demands a kind of equality and freedom from fear that is too little in evidence. As Russell Means, a leader of the American Indian Movement of indigenous people in the USA, says: "My culture, the Lakota culture, has an oral tradition, so ordinarily I reject writing. It is one of the white world's ways of destroying the cultures of non-European peoples, the imposing of an abstraction over the spoken relationship of a people".[1]

Nevertheless, there are voices out there, in written form also, that one can listen to. Gladson Dungdung is an Adivasi activist from Jharkhand. His book *Whose Country Is It anyway?*[2] brings harsh truths for anyone willing to listen to 'the other India'. In his opening words, he draws attention to a recent Supreme Court Judgement that emphasizes Adivasis' position as India's indigenous people. What does this mean in India, whose population has an unprovable history of layers upon layers of indigeneity and long-past invasions? Above all, it is through a rootedness to the earth and links to the land. In Odisha, for example, it is easily observable that Adivasi languages have names for every feature of the landscape and species of plant or animal life in a way that Odia[3] does not. This rootedness of culture and identity to the land is what makes Adivasi people and communities so hard-hit when they get dispossessed, which in turn is why so many Adivasi movements are resisting further displacement so hard right now.

'Adivasi' means 'First Dwelling', with similar connotations to 'Indigenous' or 'Aboriginal'. The word 'Adivasi' only came into use in the 1930s through political leader Jaipal Singh in what is now Jharkhand.[4] The official term is 'Scheduled Tribe' (ST). One difficulty occurs because many tribal groups have been classified differently, as 'Other Backwards Castes' (OBCs) for example, such as the *Kurmi* or *Mahato*, who live in parts of Jharkhand, West Bengal and north Odisha, who considered themselves higher in status than other tribes during the 1930s when the classification got fixed – though in the Sunderbans, where numbers of Kurmis were settled during British times, they retain ST status!

The British brought huge numbers of central Indian tribal people to Northeast India, and settled them there to work in tea plantations. This has brought them gradually into conflict with tribes indigenous to Assam, and this conflict has escalated painfully in recent years, and is one reason why the term 'Adivasi' is not in general use in the northeast – or is even applied to these central Indian-origin tribal people who did not originate in Assam.

Even more than this, Adivasi society is now too often divided in three ways between an elite to some extent educated out of their traditions and complicit in the corporate culture that is staging takeovers of Adivasi lands, a Marxist or Maoist section identified with resistance against the status quo, and a more or less traditional section still trying to hold onto their lands.

British rule brought huge iniquities, and Adivasis rebelled again and again against the scarlet or khaki uniforms and unjust laws, that alienated the forest from those who have always lived in and around it. Independent India has continued the

[1] Russell Means, an iconic leader of the American Indian Movement, gave this speech in 1980, partially transcribed in Russell Means, "On a New Consciousness of the American Indian Movement", *Lokayan Buletin*, 7 (August 1982), and quoted in Felix Padel, *Sacrificing People: Invasions of a Tribal Landscape* (Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2010) 26, 29.

[2] Gladson Dungdung, *Whose Country Is It Anyway? Untold Stories of the Indigenous Peoples of India (*Kolkata: Adivaani, 2013).

[3] The official language of Odisha – both officially renamed in 2010.

[4] The Indian state north of Odisha, formed by bifurcating Bihar in the year 2000.

same power structures in a system of 'internal colonialism', enforcing a vast scale of dispossession. Estimates of the number of tribal people displaced by 'development' in India since Independence suggest that at least 20 million – a quarter of the ST population – have lost their land and/or homes.[5]

So Adivasis' cultures and worldviews face their direst threats right now, from mining projects and metal factories invading their lands, big dams drowning them, and a vicious civil war which enlists them in large numbers on both sides: 'Special Police Officers' in police-trained militias such as the 'Koya Commandos', and Maoists, promising revenge and emancipation, in a war without any end in sight, especially in Chhattisgarh.[6]

'Structural violence' is the phrase summing up the overall repression that Adivasis face, in war as well as peace. One aspect is that thousands are burdened with false court cases as Maoists. Arun Ferreira is a middle class Mumbaiker arrested in eastern Maharashtra in mid-2007 on false charges of complicity in Maoist attacks, and jailed 'under-trial' for over four years. As he shows, in his book *Colours of the Cage: A Prison Memoir*,[7] for every middle class under-trial in India, jailed on false charges, there are hundreds of Adivasis, for whom the madness of charge-sheets and legal mis-procedure represent a net almost impossible to escape from.

What shows the true colours of this war is the vastly increasing employment and deployment of armed police in tribal areas, and the use of massed police and 'false cases', not only against Maoists, but also against communities who are resisting takeover of their lands by mining companies. Part of the huge financial investment coming into local areas for key projects is clearly going into this mass police deployment.

Adivasi culture offers models of true, long-term sustainability and survival of our human species against the odds we have unleashed – models of a co-operative economy based on principles of ecology, and sharing rather than ruthless competition. But as communities are displaced and split between left and right, the human suffering escalates, and the way ahead remains opaque. What will be the future destiny of Adivasis? Can they show the rest of us the way?

The Colonial Power Structure

The main legacy of British rule in India is a power structure that for most tribal people especially was top-down in essence, initiating a mass takeover of tribal land and resources that continues today. One of the primary takeovers was the declaration of forests as state property, setting up a Forest Service in the mid-nineteenth century that has oppressed tribal people ever since. Another was the imposition of various forms of tax. A tax on the making and selling of alcoholic drinks swiftly became a key means of alienating tribal lands. In Orissa for example, the Sundi (distiller) caste took over the selling of *mahua* – the colourless drink

[5] Hari Mohan Mathur, ed., "Creating New Economic Opportunities for Displaced People: Approaches to Income Restoration", *Social Change*, Special Resettlement Issue, 36.1 (March 2006) 87-108; Felix Padel and Samarendra Das, "Orissa's Highland Clearances: The Reality Gap in R & R", *Social Change*, 38.4 (2008), 576-608.

[6] Another State formed in 2000, west of Odisha, formed out of the eastern part of Madhya Pradesh.

[7] Arun Ferreira, *Colours of the Cage: A Prison Memoir* (Delhi: Aleph, 2014).

distilled from flowers of the *mahua* tree. Selling it to Adivasis and getting them into compound debt has forfeited the lands of thousands of families.

Demands for exorbitant revenue by the East India Company from Rajahs[8] started another trend that continues today – the pressure to make land as profitable as possible. Many Rajahs brought in more 'efficient' cultivators, such as the Koltas in Orissa, who dispossessed original inhabitants. The Kalahandi rebellion of Konds in 1884 started out with a massacre of these usurping Koltas.[9] Most tribal rebellions were caused by a combination of these factors. British rule tilted the balance of power in favour of exploiting classes who encroached on Adivasi land and custom in many ways.

In pre-British times, rajahs in Orissa legitimised their power through two means – through the temple, in particular the Jagannath cult centred in Puri, towards their Hindu subjects, and towards tribal subjects by identifying their authority with local cults. Often a stone representing a tribal deity was installed in the Rajah's palace, which in Orissa was always next to a temple of Jagannath. Jagannath himself ('Lord of the Universe') was a composite deity drawn from Shaivite, Vaishnav as well as Buddhist and tribal elements. The main myth of Jagannath states that the deity was 'stolen' by a Hindu king from the Sabara tribe.[10]

In a sense this is the opposite of conversion: Hinduism absorbed tribal deities and religion, and the influence was two way, so that Adivasis understood Jagannath, Durga, Bhairav/Shiva, even Ram and Lakshman as their own, with their own versions of their myths. This fits with the role of tribal people laid down in the *Arthashastra*,[11] which recommends that kings should organise their forest-dwelling subjects into buffer forces, guarding the frontiers of their domain.

This is not to say that this form of rule was always benign, but it made Rajahs dependent on following the custom and goodwill of their tribal subjects. In the kingship rituals of many Rajahs, from Orissa to Rajasthan, a ruler's inauguration was publicly sealed by his tribal subjects. In some areas of central India, Gond kingdoms rose from tribal roots, in a process of Hinduisation, that continues in another way today with the gradual takeover of tribal shrines by Hindu symbols, edifices and priesthoods. To take a typical example, Maa Markoma is the Kond goddess patronised by the Rajah of Bissamcuttack in Orissa, over several centuries. In the time I have known her temple, it transformed from a small shrine in the forest to a massive temple modelled on classical Oriya forms, surrounded by a wall and garden, whose construction has been funded by a succession of politicians.

British rule transformed the legitimation of Rajahs' power. Instead of depending on the goodwill of tribal subjects, a Rajah had to please British rulers, especially by giving them the tribute demanded by the East India Company: default on payments led the British to depose hundreds of rulers, replacing them at will or annexing the kingdoms. A class of moneylenders and revenue collectors gained power in every kingdom, who increased the exploitation and dispossession of tribal subjects. Rajahs' authority was now backed by the force of British arms.[12]

[8] Usually translated as 'Kings'.

[9] Felix Padel, *Sacrificing People: Invasions of a Tribal Landscape*, (Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2010); "Mining Projects and Cultural Genocide: Colonial Roots of Present Conflicts", in Biswamoy Pati, ed., *Adivasis in Colonial India: Survival, Resistance and Negotiation* (Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2011), 316-337.

[10] Hermann Kulke, "Legitimation and Town Planning in the Feudatory States in Central Orissa", in Jan Pieper, ed., *Ritual Space in India: Studies in Architectural Anthropology* (London: Art and archaeology research papers, 17, 1980), 30-40; Padel, *Sacrificing People*, 36, 129.

[11] 'Science of material gain' (the literal meaning of *artha*) or 'Treatise on political economy'. A text attributed to Kautilya, who was Minisiter to Chandragupta, grandfather of Ashoka.

[12] Padel, *Sacrificing*, chapter 5.

One of the first episodes in recorded Indian history shows the less benign side – the initial conquest, long before the British. After Emporer Ashoka waged the Kalinga war around 270 BC, against a people without kings in Orissa who fiercely resisted his authority, he estimated in inscriptions that the war killed 100,000 people, enslaved 150,000, and killed many more through an aftermath of famine and disease. Almost certainly, the Kalinga people were basically the Konds, who call themselves Kuinga, and whose history involved increasing displacement from coastal areas towards Orissa's western interior.[13] This means that Kond culture is well over 2,300 years old. Presumably, Kalinga culture was already strong, with ancient roots, when they put up such a fierce resistance to Ashoka's invading soldiers. Their vanished past includes coastal towns and wooden buildings, as well as a tradition of seafaring towards Southeast Asia. Many surmise that Telugu-speaking fishermen who inhabit much of Orissa's coastline are also remnants of the Kalinga. A parallel is the Tupinamba civilisation who inhabited a large part of Brazil's coastline in large cities, who traded extensively with the Portuguese during the early sixteenth century, and who were exterminated after the first generation of contact, vanishing almost without trace.

[13] Padel and Das, "Orissa's Highland Clearances", 55. See also Romilia Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (Delhi: Oxford U. P., 1961).

Mainstream civilisations in India did not generally annihilate previous cultures to the genocidal extent that became the norm throughout the continent of America. But without any doubt, every Indian tribal culture is the remnant of a civilisation that traces its roots back for centuries before recorded history.

British rule set in motion a dispossession of these cultures, not only from their land and resources, but from their own identity and traditions. After initially resisting the influence of missionaries as an interference with the business interests of the East India Company, British rule in tribal areas gradually delegated key roles in the process of 'civilising the savage tribes' to Christian missionaries. Tribal areas were essentially parcelled out between many different Protestant and Roman Catholic missionary societies, who took on the task of giving them 'education' and the benefits of modern medicine. Medical and educational establishments were often geared towards the aim of conversion. As a result, large sections of many tribal peoples became Christian from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.[14]

[14] See Padel, *Sacrificing*, chapter 6.

The proportion of converts was particularly large in Northeast India, since many of these communities, unlike those of central India, felt little affinity with Hindusim. In what is now Jharkhand, central Orissa, and many other areas, conversion to Christianity often split communities, and led to a strong initial rejection of certain aspects of their tradition. For example, missionaries encouraged many communities to cut down their sacred groves. In more recent times, Christian Adivasis have tended to recreate a synthesis, highlighting the ecological values embedded in pre-Christian traditions. Even now though, conversion to Christianity often demands, for example, a rejection of huge traditional knowledge systems of herbal medicine, since Christianity has become identified with modern medicine and hospitals. Which is strange, since the role of Jesus, as an outstanding

faith healer highlighted in the Bible, has more in common with shamanic healing techniques than with hospital medical practice.

Colonial anthropology also had a strong impact on how tribal cultures are classified and perceived – above all as 'primitive' in every domain. Though many colonial administrators and missionaries took a strong positive interest in tribal cultures, the way they reduced this 'knowledge' to paper, *objectified* the cultures, compounding the political subjugation with an intellectual subjugation.[15]

The missionary and anthropologist roles reinforced state interests in defining tribal people as 'primitive', 'backward', 'pre-literate' and 'in need of development', paving the way for an escalating dispossession after Independence, in the name of 'development', geared towards mass takeovers of the land, forests, mountains, water sources and minerals in and under tribal territories.

Internal Colonialism, Investment-Induced Displacement

In most parts of India, the takeover started slowly. But Telengana[16] witnessed large-scale violence right after Independence, when communists backed tribal and other peasant communities taking back alienated lands in an estimated 3,000 villages, which were soon being violently repossessed by landlords, backed by the Indian army. In Nagaland, repression of tribal rebels reluctant to recognise Indian hegemony became extremely violent from 1955. Sociologist A.R. Desai, in pioneering work too little highlighted, recorded the extremely violent repression used against insurgents in Northeast India from the 1950s on.[17]

Elsewhere, the first mega-dams involved mass displacement of tribal communities from the 1950s-60s on. Sometimes tribal communities strongly resisted being displaced by dams, and this resistance was violently suppressed. Even memory of many anti-dam movements has tended to be repressed, but it was certainly there, for example in Orissa against the Hirakud dam in the 1950s-60s, and against the Rengali and Upper Indravati dams in subsequent decades, up to vicious repression of the Lower Suktel dam since 2010.[18] The pattern in almost every dam-displacement is the same: extravagant promises backed by force, followed by the betrayal of almost every promise given. The documentary *DAM-aged*[19] presents revealing interviews with Adivasi villagers whose lands were drowned, and whose promises for good land and water, electricity, education, medicine etc have been betrayed *in toto*. A new generation of mega-dams in Northeast India threatens to displace large parts of surviving intact communities such as the *Idu Mishmi* and *Adi* tribes, and is causing huge tension within Arunachal Pradesh and other areas that have been free from insurgency. An Agartala Declaration of 15th February 2013 and a Dimapur declaration on 18th May 2013 both asserted the rights of indigenous northeasterners to their land and resources.[20] This follows a long history of dispossession by mega-dams even in the Northeast.

[15] Padel, *Sacrificing*, chapter eight is a critique of colonial anthropology and the continuation of a colonial style of anthropology post Independence; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed, 2012) gives a more general critique of anthropological objectification from the Maori experience in New Zealand.

[16] The Telengana rebellion, which started just before Independence, is dated to 1946-51. Andhra Pradesh was bifurcated in 2014 to create a new State called Telengana.

[17] See in particular Akshai Ramanlal Desai, ed., *Violation of Democratic Rights in India* (London: Sangam Books, and Delhi: Popular Prakashan, 1986) and *Repression and Resistance: Violation of Democratic Rights of the Working Class, Rural Poor, Adivasis and Dalits* (Bombay: South Asia Books, 1990), 309-311.

[18] Padel and Das, "Orissa's Highland Clearances", 72-100. On recent repression against protesters threatened with displacement by the Lower Suktel dam, Subrat Kumar Sahu "Dams and the Doomed... Min(e)d Games of the State", *Sanhati*, 29 April, 2013 at http://sanhati.com/excerpted/6661/.

[19] *DAM-aged* (2010). Documentary by Subrat Kumar Sahu in Odia and Kuwi with English subtitles and commentary.

[20] The Agartala Declaration Of Indigenous Peoples' Consultation On Dams And Natural Resources Protection In India's North East, is available at http://indigenouspeoplesissues.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17252: india-agartala-declaration-of-indigenous-peoples-consultation-on-dams-and-natural-resources-protection-in-india-s-north-east&catid=33:central-asia-indigenous-peoples&Itemid=66. See also on the Dimapur Declaration: Richard Kamei. "Hydro Power Projects and Northeast India: Ecology and Equity at Stake", *Kafila,* 30 June 2013, at http://kafila.org/2013/06/30/hydro-power-projects-and-northeast-india-ecology-and-equity-at-stake/ Kamei, Richard 2013. "Hydro Power Projects and Northeast India: Ecology and Equity at Stake", *Kafila* 30 June, at http://kafila.org/2013/06/30/hydro-power-projects-and-northeast-india-ecology-and-equity-at-stake/. On northeastern dams generally, see Felix Padel, Ajay Dandekar and Jeemol Unni, *Ecology Economy: Quest for a Socially Informed Connection* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2013), 59-61.

For example, the Dimbur dam in Tripura displaced an estimated 20,000 members of the Borok tribe in the early 1970s.

If dams have been the biggest displacer of Adivasis, mining and metal projects come a close second, and here the corporate interests in play are extremely clear. In fact, the two are connected, since metal factories consume large amounts of the water and hydro-power supplied by mega-dams. Among the worst offenders is a company that has paid a lot to maintain a high reputation – Tata Steel. The Gua massacre of Ho Adivasis 20 km south of Noamundi, in the south of what is now Jharkand is among the worst single massacre of Adivasis in post-Independence India, which took place over several days from 7th September 1980, against Adivasis protesting against land seizures for a new steel plant, which included the killing by police of wounded Adivasis in a hospital. The Kalinganagar massacre on 2nd January 2006 involved police firing against Adivasi protestors in Jajpur district of Orissa, who objected to land being taken for a vast new steel factory on their land, that has since been built; with subsequent firings in 2010. Over a dozen Adivasis died at Kalinganagar, and probably many more than this at Gua.

The steel and coal industries have caused mass-scale Adivasi displacement, and so has the aluminium industry. Nalco (National aluminium company, set up in Joint Venture with the French giant Pechiney from 1980) started the displacement process at Damanjodi in Koraput district of Orissa from 1980. Though Nalco's resettlement of displaced Adivasis is often claimed as exemplary, investigations on the ground prove otherwise. Poverty indicators in Koraput are among the worst in India despite – or because of – 30 years of aluminium-oriented 'development'.[21] Among the side effects are at least 500 sex workers in Damanjodi,[22] and a devastated, desiccated landscape where once there was forest.

Niyamgiri is a mountain range a bit over 100 kms to the northeast, inhabited by the Dongria Konds. This is where the London-based company Vedanta has been trying to mine bauxite, building its Lanjigarh refinery just below the peak it wanted to mine, without first obtaining permission to mine. As a result, its factory is running at a loss, bringing bauxite from distant areas. A drawn-out movement of local people with a broad range of support from civil society has ensured that Niyamgiri remains intact. After a complex history, a Supreme Court order in April 2013 asked for the villages nearest the bauxite deposit to decide whether they wanted mining-based 'development' or not. Dalits joined Dongria in voting unanimously 'no' to mining, and 'no' also to getting parcels of forest land allotted to each family under the Forest Rights Act, insisting that the mountain and its forests belong to them all: a rejection of private property in favour of the tradition of communal property characteristic of tribal societies.

To many Odias, the minerals in Odisha's mountains are lying 'unutilised', with potential to generate great wealth in one of India's poorest states. To anyone who understands the way the mining industry works, this is a con: profits never give real benefit to local communities; mining and metal production generate wealth for a

[21] Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), *Rich Lands, Poor People: Is Sustainable Mining Possible?* (Delhi: CSE, 2008).

[22] Kevin Perry, "Secrets and Lies: Tackling HIV among sex workers in India", *The Guardian,* 7 December 2010, at http://kevinegperry.com/2010/12/07/secrets-and-lies-tackling-hiv-among-sex-workers-in-india/.

tiny, distant elite, at the cost of devastated communities and ecosystems. As Dongria leader, Lado Sikoka put this, "People think there's crores of rupees at the top of our mountain. It's not money up there, it's our *Maa-Baap* (Mother-Father) and we'll defend her!"[23]

[23] Sikaka speaking at the Belamba Public Hearing, Lanjigarh on 28 April 2009, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipHmVee_uXw

Yet the cost is high. Vedanta is still exerting great pressures to try and obtain mining rights to Niyamgiri or one of the nearby mountains such as those near Karlapat or Kashipur, which would be equally destructive for local communities and forest ecologies. Tribal people understand mountains as sources of life. In scientific terms, the bauxite capping these mountains acts as a sponge, absorbing monsoon rain and releasing it slowly through perennial streams, which start to dry up in summer as soon as the deposit starts to be mined. The first geologists who surveyed these mountains noted the exceptional fertility around them due to their abundant perennial water sources, calling their base rock Khondalite after those fine hill men, the Khonds who live all around them. A reciprocal relationship: the Odia writer Gopinath Mohanty, recorded a Census official, asking Konds their religion got the unexpected answer 'Mountains'. And in the words of a Dongria woman, speaking out against mining, "We need the mountain and the mountain needs us".[24]

[24] Padel and Das, "Orissa's Highland Clearances", 579, 597.

Following Maoists' kidnap of two Italian tourists in 2012, and demand to ban 'tribal tours', tourists no longer visit Dongria villages. In their place, the CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) visit, on the pretext of searching for Maoists, with frequent acts of intimidation and disrespect, culminating in the arrest of Dongria leader Haribandhu Kadraka on blatantly false charges of Maoist activity.

Though both sides project the Maoist conflict as ideological, basically it is a war over resources. Maoists may be correct that it is class war, but their attacks on tribal elites led to the formation of Salwa Judum,[25] and their attacks on police lead to violent retaliation on surrounding villages, which escalates the conflict. Both sides are prepared to allow a horrendous sacrifice of human life to further their aims, and Maoists, while they name themselves after Mao, will never give a proper critique of the mining industry, if only because Mao's 'Great Leap Forward' in 1958-60, which caused one of the world's worst famines, displaced millions of cultivators from the land in order to raise the national steel output – precisely what India is doing now.

[25] 'Purification hunt' seems to be the best translation of this Gondi expression. Another version often found is 'peace march', which is highly inappropriate.

Hundreds of Adivasi communities are now divided between those joining the Maoist cadres, and those enrolling as SPOs (Special Police Officers – tens of thousands of Adivasis enlisted for fighting the Maoists), making this a classic civil war, and arguably the worst war there has ever been in India, since it enlists Adivasis on both sides, and displaces some of the country's most ancient communities.

The dispossession taking place in India's mining areas is technically *investment-induced displacement*. The usual phrase is 'development-induced displacement', but for most tribal people displaced, the projects dispossessing them do not represent

real development at all, but its polar opposite – an undermining of centuries of development, forming cultures that base their economy on principles of ecology. The impact of mining and displacement is the dividing of communities and the undermining of highly developed systems of balance between people and nature. Mineral-oriented investment into tribal areas is basically promoting a resource war, by funding a massive increase in employment of armed police there, at the same time as boosting the arms industry.

Ancient Futures?

Tribal cultures are adapted to long-term survival. They offer examples that have sustained over centuries of how to draw sustenance from nature without destroying it, based on restraint – not taking too much, or before first fruit ceremonies are performed: a completely different model from the dominant relationship with nature inherited from the West, based on dominating nature and exploiting it to the maximum for short-term gain, at the same time romanticising it into pretty paintings, photos, or gardens where foreign species and regimented straight lines predominate.

Ancient Futures is the title of Helena Norberg-Hodge's seminal work on Ladakh,[26] that analyses how Buddhist Ladakhi traditions evolved a careful balance with fragile Himalayan ecosystems that modern life is undermining fast. The same analysis applies in India's tribal areas, in Central India, the Northeast, and elsewhere. India's remaining forests and water sources are under threat from a rapidly expanding economic system where short term profit is the main principle guiding politics as well as industry. When producing one tonne of steel consumes over 40 tonnes of water, and one tonne of aluminium consumes over 1,000 tonnes of water, and India's groundwater and other water sources are rapidly depleting, what sense does economic growth make if it is based on rapid extraction of the country's remaining minerals and water sources? What future will be left for coming generations, in 1,000, 100 or even 20 years?

'Adivasi Economics' evokes economic systems not based on money, but on ecological principles of restraint and respect towards nature, prioritising sharing over competition.[27] It is a paradox that some of India's tribal people perceived as 'most primitive' have shown the greatest skills in survival. None of the Andaman islanders were killed in the 2004 tsunami: seeing the sea recede, they retreated to high ground, understanding instinctively or from tradition what was coming. It is to the immense credit of the Indian Government tat the Jarawa Reserve for the largest remaining Andamans tribe, who survived the genocide started during British rule; has been set aside, that tourism in most of the Nicobar Islands has been forbidden; and that the Sentinel Islanders are allowed to resist any encroachment to their island with bows and arrows – a unique situation worldwide, and an outstanding example of restraint by a Government.[28]

[26] Helena Norberg-Hodge, *Ancient Futures: Lessons from Ladakh for a Globalizing World* (San Francisco: Sierra Book Club, 2009).

[27] See Padel, Dandekar and Unni, *Ecology Economy*, chapter 2.

[28] On 4th-5th December 2014, the author participated in a National Conference in Port Blair, "Thinking Futures: the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands". See also Madhusree Mukerjee, *The Land of Naked People: Encounters with Stone Age Islanders* (Delhi: Penguin, 2003), and Sita Venkateswar, *Development and Ethnocide: Colonial Practices in the Andaman Islands* (Copenhagen: IWGA, 2004).

Yet the tendency is still to see tribal peoples as 'primitive survivals', especially the most traditional groups until recently classified as 'Primitive Tribal Groups' (PTGs), and now officially 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups' (PVTGs), which includes the Dongria Konds, the Paudi Bhuiyas, threatened by mining in the Khandadhar range of north Orissa, as well as all the Andaman Islanders. This way of seeing came out of anthropology when it was still at a primitive stage. 'Social Darwinism' is an inappropriate, monolithic application of Darwin's theory of evolution, which traced the simultaneous development of hundreds of species along different paths to society, in the mistaken belief that all societies develop through the same, set stages. Societies develop along many different paths. Industrialisation represents one path, but imposed over tribal societies it often leads to an extreme undoing of indigenous development. Also, what was so shocking to fundamentalist believers about Darwin's theory was it showed that humans are closely related to animals – precisely as tribal myths in India, and other countries, emphasize that other species of animals are our relatives and ancestors, against the idea that other species were created for humans to dominate and exploit.

What is urgently needed is to dismantle the stereotypes underlying the structural violence and injustice being played out towards tribal peoples; to perceive them as highly evolved societies we have much to learn from about the skills needed for long-term survival: sharing natural resources instead of fighting over them, living frugally instead of competing over elaborate status symbols, and living with a lot more joy. One of the areas where tribal cultures are much more highly developed than the mainstream is in elaborate skills of self-entertainment, including dancing, improvised song, and an elaborate culture of romance. Another is in legal systems, recorded for many of India's tribal peoples that aim at reconciling contestants, through fines that pay for feasts of reconciliation, rather than a process that makes one party right, the other wrong, in a system presided over lawyers where outcomes often depend on massive fees, and are open to corruption.

In conclusion, Adivasis, or tribal people, represent India's most ancient cultures, and preserve the strongest set of nature-respecting values, which can be summarised as 'deep ecology' – an economy based on ecological principles, of living lightly on the land and minimising private property, with strong emphasis on sharing and exchange labour. Adivasis' present condition is extremely harsh, as patterns of exploitation and outsider-domination have escalated to extreme levels of dispossession and marginalisation, with a hideous civil war in areas of eastern central India. The militarisation of areas that were extremely peaceful 20-30 years ago is painful to witness, compounded by an education system that attempts to 'assimilate' tribal children into the mainstream, both in terms of hindutva (Hindu nationalism) and an industrialising ideology. We may hope that, before long, this historic injustice will start to be corrected, and mainstream society will begin to

learn from the values and techniques of long-term sustainability that Adivasi culture is based on.

Rossella Ciocca and Ganesh N. Devy

Beyond Cultural Aphasia. A Conversation with Ganesh Devy on Indian Adivasis

Abstract: Ganesh N. Devy is a renowned literary critic and activist for the human and cultural rights of Adivasis in India. He is the founder director of the *Bhasha Research and Publication Center* and *Adivasi Academy* at Tejgadh (Gujarat) established to create a unique educational environment for tribal communities. He led the *People's Linguistic Survey of India* in 2010, which has researched and documented 780 living Indian languages. Formerly professor of English at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, among his many academic assignments, he has held fellowships at Leeds, Yale and Jawaharlal Nerhu Universities. He has been awarded several Prizes and Awards for his works and researches and in recognition of his work for the conservation of the history, languages and cultures of denotified and nomadic tribes (DNTs). Along with Laxman Gaikwad and Mahasweta Devi, he is one of the founders of 'The Denotified and Nomadic Tribes Rights Action Group'. He returned his Sahitya Akademi Award in October 2015 as a mark of protest against intolerance towards differences of opinion and in solidarity with other writers who see a threat to Indian democracy and secularism. He is taking part in the Dakshinayan movement that has sprung up through a collective desire to forge a new solidarity between cinema, theatre, literature and the arts in defense of freedom of expression and the dignity and spirituality of the human. What follows is a conversation on the main issues concerning the condition of Adivasis in India today.

Keywords: *colonial*, *post-colonial*, *development*, *caste*, *gender*, *indigenous languages*

Colonial, postcolonial, neocolonial. Historical precedents, post-millennial Indian politics

RC The first question I'd like to discuss with you is about a possible ongoing colonial legacy on the system of inequities still suffered by Indian Adivasis. I mean, starting from the objective observation that the most part of India's eighty million Adivasis, after 68 years of independence, still live below the poverty line, lacking education, economic support from the state and access to healthcare, do you see a sort of historical continuity in the passage from the colonial archive where tribals figured often as rebellious and sometimes even as 'habitual offenders' to the postcolonial scene in which they are presented usually as 'backward' and not rarely as threatening actors in insurgent movements against national security?

GD Though humans are gifted with the twin power to remember as well as to forget, memory as well as amnesia, histories invariably continue to stick to our every-day existence. The way we walk, eat, exchange opinions, form thoughts, create what we call beauty – all of these carry invisible but multiple layers of

history, many pasts that the mind may forget but life does not. The colonial experience in India was protracted and pervasive. It affected most aspects of how we know ourselves and how we conduct ourselves. Our idea of justice and our perception of injustice too were deeply affected by the colonial notions of law and order, fairness and impropriety. Besides, after independence, it was not as if India started on a blank page. Neither the colonial process nor the experience of de-colonization in India can really be compared – except superficially – with those processes and experience in Australia or Canada. For civilizations that have long-standing legacies, these things work differently. In India, there already was a surplus of inequality prior to the colonial rule. The colonial rule compounded inequality by bringing in agents of change not known before. These included a notion of regulated citizenship that worked less through affection and more through economic norms. Those who could pay taxes, or had land related occupations, were more easily acceptable to the colonial imagination of citizenship (as subject). The nomads and the Adivasis fell out of that framework and came to be seen as distant from the State. During the post-independence period, this distance was sought to be reduced (not entirely eliminated!) by creating a' Schedule of Tribes' and a 'Schedule of Castes' for receiving positive discrimination. But, the mindset of the people did not change in tune with the spirit of equality enshrined in the Constitution. Besides, India's transition to a technological and industrial economic power required an unopposed access to the areas in the tribal forests for mining. The scale of this operation has been really massive. A lot of displacement and disempowerment arise out of the post-independence industrial activities. But, carrying out those activities remained easy as the Adivasi had come to be seen as 'a distant citizen' during the colonial times. One can therefore say that the alienation of Adivasis from the Indian state, and the vast inequality with which they are saddled have roots in the colonial structures, but these have seen a rapid increase in the last half-century. In every age and every society, those who are most deprived of the economic means and access to improved life conditions come to be seen as potential 'dangerous' section of the society. Think of the Gypsies in Europe. The 'denotified' communities in India have faced a similar challenge. It combines social stigma with economic deprivation.

RC Considering your peculiar historical knowledge is there a shared logic in the various 'Criminal Tribes Acts' (1871, 1921), 'Land Acquisition Act' (1894) and 'Indian Forest Acts' (1865, 1878, 1927) of the colonial period and a sort of internal neocolonial present in which, however 'denotified', Tribals are still deeply affected by an unfriendly legislation? I'm thinking for example of the Special Economic Zones Act (2005) or, for different reasons and cases of enforcement, of the various Armed Forces Special Powers Acts (1958, 1983, 1990).

GD It needs be understood that the basis of the 'Criminal Tribes Act (s)' was not moral. These Acts, beginning with the 1871 CTA, were not made in order to rescue humanity out of degradation. They were a cumulative result of various steps towards suppression of perceived potential risks to the 'society' that had accepted the normative framework of the British Raj. Thus, the primary interest was to keep the social order safe, for the colonial rule was justified as a 'giver of law and order' to India. The Forest Act had to be brought in not because the Indian forests were dwindling. Had they really been facing the risk of depletion, the sports like Shikar and Tiger-hunt would have found no support in the colonial notion of leisure. The primary aim was to bring under the government's command a valuable source for ship-building, timber. Hence, a special forest authority and code had to be created and the concept of forests as 'productive sites' had to be popularized. This was a big shift from the idea of forest as 'sacred zones' – under divine control rather than the regal order – that Indians had traditionally valued. Land, forest and the subject population – all of them – were for the colonial rulers a single spectrum of a larger economic activity which brought wealth to England. And the laws regulating Nature and Man were conceived to serve that single goal. The more recent SEZ (*Special Economic Zones*) activity and the 'simplification of law' to support that activity are of a slightly different nature. In the previous lot of Acts, law was worked to consolidate the authority of the State. In the legal network supporting SEZ, the primary idea appears to be effecting a transition from the authority of the State to the authority of Capital (or call it the Corporate).

RC In the recent past, activists and political parties have made multiple attempts to address the predicament of Adivasis through mass protests and political activism. In some cases this has also led to armed insurgency struggles. At a certain moment it seemed that a way out of injustice and a possibility of freedom from feudal bondage was to be found only in the Naxalite movement, or in other similar guerrilla factions, but in the end, do you agree that this produced only a long series of brutalities and in certain areas the creation of a sort of perennial 'state of exception' with the systematic violation of human rights?

GD Naxalism is the name given to a mood of 'disaffection towards the State', particularly the one that promotes violence as the means of communication. Since violence is involved in it, it is not surprising that it meets with counter-violence from the state. On both sides, this has unleashed a protracted process of brutalization, dehumanization and an absurd lack of any desire for dialogue. This gives rise to numerous cases of affective victimization and violation of humans rights. On the other hand, it also gives rise to a destructive tendency hampering development of the tribal villages and to exploitative leadership that is incapable of working the existing democracy to people's advantage. It is a sad situation and I hope it comes to an end through consultation, dialogue and respect for Adivasi dignity as well as respect for human life and civilization.

The long agenda of social issues

RC As you said, both before and after independence, Adivasis have also been the object of a well meant affirmative action through a set of legislative acts aimed at protecting their cultural heritage and at promoting their inclusion in the social body (via for example the policy of special reservations for the Scheduled tribes in education and government jobs and through reservation of seats in legislatures). At the same time the general sensation is that the post-independence narration of universal citizenship finds in the condition of the Adivasis its most acute and sour disavowal. What's your opinion on the quota politics and its application?

GD The affirmative action is a good idea, but its address has remained somewhat vague. For example, the successive governments have been trying to cut down positions (vacancies) in category III and category IV (services). Thus, 8 percent positions are reserved for Adivasis; but precisely those positions where they would typically join are curtailed. It is the same with the field of education. In Gujarat, where I have spent time with Adivasis for the last twenty years, there are 7 million of them. But, for these seven million, there is not a single dedicated university. There are a very few pre-college high-schools for science subjects. Obviously, Adivasis do not get into Engineering or Medical colleges (in larger cities). So, we have favorable laws for reservation of seats in education and employment. But, the provisions remain inadequately used (or are used by the creamiest layers). But this 'quota' tends to become a volatile and emotional issue. The poorer sections among those that do not have the benefit of quota have legitimate grouse against the quota system. This gets translated into a blatant stereotyping of Tribals and contempt towards them. It is the same with the Scheduled Castes.

RC In *A Nomad Called Thief*, you state that the upward mobility registered in the last years in Hindu-caste society has left a social vacuum at the very base of the social pyramid and that the tribals are pushed, willingly or unwillingly, to fill up that gap. Do you confirm this is still going on? And anyway, what do you make of the increasing application of caste paradigms to the social fabric of tribal communities? In more than one occasion Adivasi people, like in the atrocities in Gujarat in 2002, were even involved in communal atrocities, fomented by caste or religious extremism, traditionally alien to tribal social culture. What do you make of these episodes ?

GD Sociologists use the term 'sanskritization' for a commonly shared social process of ascension to a higher economic status. Adivasi communities close to urban (or urbanized) centers of economic activities are now widely affected by the tendency to 'sanskritize' themselves. In my initial years of work with Adivasis, I used to get deeply disturbed whenever I heard from them any indication or statement of desire for a life-style that was at par with the 'modern, urban, middle-

class' style of life. I was keen that they preserved their unique social structures, their famed innate sense of equality, etc. Slowly, I started seeing the element of unfairness to Adivasis in my own response. I have now come to accept that it is by no means wrong for Adivasis to expect to get benefits of modern medicine, education, well-protected habitat, drinking water and leisure. But, this is not to say that either the Adivasis become like the others or the others become like Adivasis – and that this is the only solution for removing the inequalities. I now believe that 'essentially Adivasi' is more of a mental frame – a matter of values and beliefs – rather than an 'ethnic' identity. So, I imagine some of the non-Adivasis may like to move closer to nature as Adivasis in remote villages are, while some of the Adivasis will move into urban middle class. There is no harm if the borders slacken. The induction of Adivasis in the riots in Gujarat was a political advantage drawn upon the newly emergent desire to sanskritize. But far more important is the fact that at the root of their unfortunate involvement in riots was their being lured by the money-lenders to whom they were indebted. Much of the 'involvement' was under coercion and not as a clear acceptance of the politics of hatred and violence. Soon after the riots, in the Assembly elections, the percentage of the Adivasi vote to the rightwing party was way below what it won in the urban centers.

RC And what about the very delicate religious question, both with regard to Hinduization and Christianization of Adivasis and their episodic involvement in religious fundamentalism?

GD The worst loss of Adivasis due to the transition through which they are passing is the erosion of their idea of the sacred. They have not known organized religion. They have not known patterns of worship where a godhead or a god's representative is cased within a man-made building, a temple or a church. For them, being with nature in itself has been a form of worship. When they shift to faiths with a different idea of prayerfulness, the most inspiring notions of sanctity and divinity preserved in their practice, memory and word run the risk of being wiped out. But as affiliation to various other religions in the country imply political affiliation too, by and large, the Adivasis who lose their own moorings tend to free-wheel and gravitate close to those religious groups that have a political ascendancy. Alas!

RC Gender is another topic which seems relevant with regard to the social pressures which the Adivasis are experiencing nowadays. Is it true that the regime of relative freedom and social dignity that, at least in some groups, the Adivasi women were able to enjoy is increasingly threatened by new forms of gender discrimination deriving, at least in part, from caste politics and the fact that women are easily targeted by police repression or political organizations trying to make electoral inroads among the Tribals by every possible means, intimidation and rape not excluded?

GD The most conspicuous is the fact that Adivasis whose land is reduced (every passing generation) due to indebtedness, unfair practices of external agents, multiplication of claims on land within the family, tends to treat the woman's body as a replacement of land. I have known hundreds of Adivasi young women who were asked to shift to the nearby cities, just a day after their weddings, and get working on construction sites. This is done, apparently, to recover the sum of dowry paid by the bridegroom to the girl's family. But, in effect, the girl becomes a construction labourer and has to work in harsh conditions till the sum is gained from her wages. The body has now replaced land as a means of production. This situation has come to a boiling point and may soon explode in the form of a movement for women's rights. I hope it does and changes the situation of the Adivasi women. I have spoken to a large number of Adivasi men to pay attention to this issue; but normally I have met with a cold reception from them, even those whom I have known as friends and colleagues for two decades. Perhaps, an external feminist leadership is required.

Between development and 'slow violence': economic/ecologic issues

RC In post-liberalization India, the traditional areas of tribal settlements have increasingly become key sites of economic development and infrastructural modernization. To make way for industrial corridors, mega-dams, extractive installations or parks, that essentially benefit transnational corporations and the metropolitan elites, tribal communities are continuously displaced and, without a serious relocation policy, very often left completely deprived of their livelihoods. Bonded labor, begging, pilfering, and prostitution are common ensuing phenomena. Besides, another effect of 'development' is that kind of delayed destruction, which contaminates habitats and affects the very possibility of survival, defined by Nixon[1] as slow violence: a violence that occurs gradually and usually out of sight because perpetrated in rural areas and without media coverage. In all this, do you think that the role of the forest tribes is only that of casualties, or do you believe that, defending themselves and their lands, they could possibly become active actors of a new conception of sustainable progress, respectful of environment but at the same time also of their economic needs? I mean, don't you think that to fight against the exploitation of natural resources without being able to provide new schemes of ecological development is too weak a position, liable to be easily defeated? Don't you think that in the future of Adivasis there should be a key role for technology? On the other hand, is it true that sometimes Adivasi people have found themselves in the position to compete with protected species and protected areas for their livelihood? What's your position in relation to this sort of apparent contradiction?

[1] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard U. P., 2011).

GD I am acutely aware of how severely marginalized and cornered the Adivasis feel in the context of a market driven and globalised economy that has multiplied inequalities of all kinds. I have seen at close quarters the devastation caused by the sheer incompatibility between the tribal ethics and the modern economics. In the case of tribals (as in the case of Scheduled Castes and farmers), the intolerance is embedded in the economic outlook. But despite several thousand farmer suicides, the long-standing rural distress does not attract sufficient attention, and any movement of tribals gets to be labeled as 'anti-national' and at once caricatured as 'Naxalite' and dealt with brutally.

However, I do not think that violent opposition is the only means of opposition with the tribals. I firmly believe – and I have put this belief at the centre of all my work with the Adivasis – that violence can generate only a counter-violence and one that is far more destructive. On the other hand aping the caste India can lead Adivasis to a complete destruction of their own culture(s). Therefore, it would be best to start building the Adivasi communities from within, to make them self-reliant, not dependent on government patronage or NGO alms. The ability of the Adivasis for deciding for themselves has to be enhanced. Let them decide what is good for them and what is not good. Then they will be able to cope *on their own terms* with the challenges and stress created by the market led modernity. Sooner or later this must happen. Sooner the better as they are rapidly running out of time.

Beyond Cultural Aphasia. Performing Indigeneity: Opportunities and Dangers

RC In the *People's Linguistic Survey of India*, the first comprehensive survey of Indian languages in postcolonial period you supervised, you declared that, among other things, language is a marker of the welfare of a community. Bringing attention to Indian languages with small numbers of speakers, you said, is a way of bringing attention to the societies that speak them, along with the wellbeing of their people. With reference to the Nomadic communities, what could you say in particular about the status of health of their languages and of their cultural identities?

GD The languages of the nomadic communities in India are among the most affected by the identity issues of these communities. Imagine any stigmatized community. The first thing that the community likes to do in order to secure its survival is to try and conceal its identity. Language is an identity marker for any community, but for nomadic communities it works as an identity marker far more pervasively. When these communities try to conceal their identity in order to escape the stigma attached to them as 'criminal communities', one of the most obvious steps they take is to avoid using their language in the presence of an outsider. Thus they use a state language (other than their own) for all activities in which anyone from outside the community is involved, as in the market place,

school, public places, etc, and they use their own language only among themselves, as a kind of a 'code language'. The natural consequence is that their own languages are getting skeletal by the day. In some of the languages of the nomads, the speakers are not able any longer to mention names of all the seven days of the week or name more than two or three color terms. Linguists will describe this condition of language as 'severe endangerment'. Recently, as I was preparing the People's Linguistic Survey in Maharashtra, I came across nearly a dozen DNTs (Denotified and Nomadic Tribes) that had great difficulty in recalling even a single song from their oral tradition. Maybe, about half a century ago, they had numerous songs and stories used on all occasions and social functions. This is so sad. This imposition of silence on those communities, forced because the stigma is not by their own choice – I call 'aphasia'. Alas, so many languages are facing this threat. When the languages of communities are treated as a liability, the communities too tend to become economically further disempowered. One marginalization adds upon another, cumulatively turning such people into 'the scum of the world'. Whose life is worse than that of beasts. This is a 'lived experience' of the communities and far more worrisome than a 'painful' theoretical position.

RC The predominance of orality in Adivasi culture and the lack of official institutions adopting tribal idioms for their activities seem to condemn the tribes to a condition of growing cultural aphasia. On the other hand, since Independence, tribal cultural heritage has repeatedly been paraded in state rituals such as the Republic Day celebrations or exhibited in state-sponsored institutions such as tribal arts museums or festivals. The existence of specific forms of knowledge and the relevance accorded to the arts are usually seen as the distinct mark of tribal contribution to the cultural mosaic of the nation. But, while for long Adivasi culture has been the passive object of ethno-anthropological inquest, more recently it has also become the privileged object of narration of artists who are also political activists, like Mahasweta Devi, Arundhati Roy, Laxman Gaikwad and many others, interested in defending Adivasi way of life. What is more interesting is that nowadays it seems that many Adivasi artists are increasingly taking upon themselves the task of representing their worldview and asking, more than in the past, for a specific artistic recognition. I am referring to a whole range of experimentations with video making and art cinema, or the output of a new literacy emerging from orality, generated for instance after the textualization of tribal societies in the wake of Christianity, like in the North East.[2] But above all I am thinking of the performing and dramatic arts and the visual arts in which the Tribals seem to find their favored form of expression. See for example the great success of *Warli* art at global level. Could you explain why? And tell us something about the role of the arts in your work with the Adivasis? And finally what do you think about those who see in the national and sometimes international success of

[2] Specifically on this: Margaret Ch. Zama, ed., *Emerging Literatures from Northeast India: The Dynamics of Culture, Society and Identity* (New Delhi: Sage, 2013).

Adivasi artists, mostly painters, the danger of an evisceration of their cultural authenticity under the threat of commodification and desecration?[3]

GD In 1998, I went to the Chhara ghetto (*Chharas* are a denotified community). Mahasveta Devi was with me. This locality is situated on the outskirts of Ahmedabad (not too far from the Sabarmati Ashram where Mahatma Gandhi lived from 1917 to 1930). No one from the city of Ahmedabad was willing to accompany me as the Chhara locality (*Chhara-nagar*) was seen as a den of crime. That was the stereotype. With very great difficulty, we could enter the ghetto. On repeated visits, I could manage to make a few friends there. These were young men and women. When I asked them if they required anything as a gift from me, they responded asking for a library. We managed to create a small library in one of the houses there. At that time we were fighting for compensation for the widow of a tribal killed in police custody. The Chharas created a play (in the street theatre genre). It became a new sensation in the theatre world. As they performed again and again, the group of actors widened. The *Budhan Theatre* took birth. Over the last 18 years, this theatre has performed regularly and a wide range of plays including the Italian Dario Fo and the French Jean Genet. Hundreds of small groups spread over many cities throughout India have gone to them to learn theatre from them. A few of their actors have graduated from the National School of Drama, some have gone to England for training (and returned to their own theatre), some have taken to film production. Dakxin, the lead person of *Budhan Theatre* won the *National Human Rights Commission's National Award* for his autobiographical book (*Budhan Bolta Hai*) last year. Today, the world looks at Chharas as artists and not as criminals. Several research dissertations and books and articles have been written on the *Budhan Theatre*. For me, to be the cause for creation of the *Budhan Theatre* has been a source of immense satisfaction and a continued inspiration. So, indeed, theatre, performance, cinema – these are the means by which the expression of pain of the DNTs can be turned into a creative energy that can challenge and change the society (without taking recourse to the violent ways of the Naxalites).

[3] Rashmi Varma, "Primitive Accumulation: The Political Economy of Indigenous Art in Postcolonial India", *Third Text*, 27.6 (2013), 748-761.

RC Could you tell us something about the 'Adivasi Academy' experience?

GD Over the last two decades, the Adivasi Academy has carried out several experiments in the area of Adivasi development. It has initiated major policy debates in relation to the economic, social and cultural rights of the DNTs and the Adivasis. However, the vision inscribed in these experiments has always been that of the communities themselves. The campaigns and the enterprises were more oriented towards generating the process of self-reliance rather than achieving quantitative success. There has been a conscious attempt at recovering the cultural memory of the nomadic and Adivasi communities, and investing it into economic and social dynamics in such a way that culture could be 'monetized'. These

experiments have, from time to time, faced the orthodoxy of funding agencies in that the 'projects' that could not promise a direct economic output were rarely supported by them. This has, however, been seen by the Adivasi Academy as an opportunity to become self-reliant rather than as a stumbling block in 'development'. It is therefore that the Adivasi Academy has not stopped functioning even for a day despite long spells of having no external funding support. Irrespective of the nature of the interventions, each and every intervention has been fully owned by the Adivasi and the DNT community for which it was conceptualized. This is probably the most significant and 'valuable' feature of the Academy's experimentation. It can therefore be replicated in the context of any community in the world which faces lack of access and marginalization. Similar experiments elsewhere, taken together with the learning at the Adivasi Academy, will help us in developing the precise method of working out the conversion between economic capital and social capital.

RC Prof. Devy let me ask you one last question. In your letter to the *Sahitya Akademi* returning the 1993 Award given to your book, *After Amnesia*,[4] you write "I do this as an expression of my solidarity with several eminent writers who have recently returned their awards to highlight their concern and anxiety over the shrinking space for free expression and growing intolerance towards difference of opinion". To what particular conditions of "shrinking space for free expression" were you referring to?

[4] Ganesh N. Devy, *After Amnesia: Tradition and Change in Indian Literary Criticism* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1992).

GD Writers like Perumal Murugan had to publicly declare that he would cease writing. Thinkers like Narendra Dabholkar and M. M. Kalburgi were shot dead. Activist Govind Pansare was killed similarly. Those who protested were hackled or humiliated in a variety of ways. Any public statement in favour of tolerance and inclusiveness of diversity at once generates massive ridicule in social media with trolls forcing many to withdraw from the FB or Twitter. Faces of speakers are blackened publicly to silence them and to terrify their audiences, artists are told to march off to another country if they even murmur protest – all these together lead me to say that free expression has become difficult, a dispassionate and rational view of events in the country is under attack and any dissenting view is an invitation to getting ridiculed.

The sudden outburst of anguish from so many writers and artists has taken the country by complete surprise. It has occupied substantial media space and engaged the curiosity of citizens. Various political parties have commented on it by placing themselves as allies or adversaries. But the most important element of the *Indian Writers Discontent* (IWD) is that it is not an organized movement, nor a conspiracy. One of the politicians commented that this is an engineered disaffection for the state with backing from a political party. This view has the fatal flaw in understanding of the IWD as a social or a political movement. It is neither.

The writers who responded to this suddenly manifest cultural impulse are not from any single political background or affiliation. What matters the most is their emphasis on the increased intolerance in social life. In my statement sent to the Sahitya Akademi I have described them as "writers and thinkers who have come forward to rescue sense, good-will, values, tolerance and mutual respect. The great idea of India is based on a profound tolerance for diversity and difference. They far surpass everything else in importance".

At the heart of our great democracy is the idea of diversity and respect for that diversity. Respect for those who are not like oneself requires an ability to listen to different voices, a high level of tolerance. Democracy can be deepened by tolerance, and conversely it can be weakened by intolerance. Civilization can be enriched by respect for life and other ways of looking at life. Writers today have stood up to remind the country that weakening the foundations of democracy will be at our own peril.

RC Thank you very much.

Marine Carrin

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.

Mara Matta

The *Khasi New Wave*. Addressing Indigenous Issues from a Literary and Cinematic Perspective

Abstract: In 2011, the *khasi* language film *19/87* was selected for the prestigious International Documentary and Short Film Festival of Kerala. Directed by Wanphrang Diengdoh, in collaboration with the filmmaker Dondor Lyngdoh and the writer Janice Pariat, the film was received by some critics as 'the birth of Khasi New Wave'. Devised as part of an experimental trilogy set in the city of Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, the film tells the story of a Khasi youth, Banri, who befriends a Muslim tailor, Suleiman. Whilst they are both Indian nationals, insiders to the Indian Territory, Suleiman is a *dkhar*, a term used by the Khasis to refer to people they consider 'outsiders' to their ethnic group, 'foreigners' to the tribal hills and, ultimately, 'strangers' to the land. The only film of the trilogy to have been released so far, *19/87* is an important work of social history that addresses the ambivalent condition of 'the stranger' in an imaginary Khasiland. This article looks at *19/87*, both in its literary and cinematic modes of storytelling, as important authorial works that aim at deconstructing the artificial idea of a pure *khasiness*, where those who allegedly 'do-not-belong' are constantly placed in an ambiguous and, sometimes, dangerous situation. Both the film by Diengdoh and Lyngdoh and the short story by Pariat represent important authorial works that combine artistic experimentation with social commitment, contributing to the development of innovative literatures and cinemas in India.

Keywords: *identity*, *insider/outsider, khasi, dkar*, *historiophoty*, *New Wave cinema*

Introduction. Strangers to this land? Of insiders, outsiders and friends

> Ethnicity-based enmity is the most frightening and unpredictable thing I have ever experienced. The man you were friend with in the morning becomes your killer in the evening.
> (Bhumi Raj Limbu, a Nepali-speaking survivor of the 2010 riots in Meghalaya)[1]

In 2011, the *khasi* language film *19/87* was selected for the prestigious International Documentary and Short Film Festival of Kerala.[2] Wanphrang Diengdoh, a young Khasi director, musician and sociologist, had devised this 36-minutes film in collaboration with other two friends, the filmmaker Dondor Lyngdoh and the writer Janice Pariat.[3] The film, intended to be part of an experimental trilogy to be set in the city of Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, recounts the story of a Khasi youth, Banri, who befriends a Muslim tailor, Suleiman.[4] Whilst they are both Indian nationals, insiders to the Indian territory, Suleiman is a *dkhar*, a Khasi term used to refer to people that are considered 'outsiders' to the Khasi group, 'foreigners' to the tribal hills and, ultimately, 'strangers' to the land.[5]

The highly politicized dichotomy between tribal and non-tribal groups, the

[1] This statement was made by a Nepali-speaking Assamese coal miner in Meghalaya who was attacked during the 2010 riots by a mob of Khasis who reclaimed the village where Limbu lived as belonging to their tribal lands. The riots of 2009-2010, like the ones in 1987, mostly targeted Nepali-speaking people, perceived as 'outsiders' (*dkhars*) by the indigenous Khasis, the majoritarian group in Meghalaya inhabiting what were known as the Khasi Hills. The Khasis, and the other two indigenous groups – the Garos and the Jantias – deem the non-tribals responsible for the paucity of jobs, the growing poverty and the loss of tribal lands. Whilst the indigenous people's grievances are usually directed towards the Bengali-speaking settlers, as thousands have been estimated to have crossed over to the Northeast of India during and after 1971 (when Bangladesh was created as an independent nation-state), the ethnic riots in Meghalaya during the last forty years have repeatedly targeted other groups like the Nepalis, the Assamese and the Marwaris, all perceived as a social and economic threat to tribal culture, ethos and livelihood. Ethno-nationalism in Meghalaya is fuelled by poverty, and the "outsider discourse" (McDuie-Ra 2009) is politically maneuvered to create 'enemies' against whom the indigenous people ventilate their anger and frustration. For an investigation of the ethnic conflicts in Meghalaya and the recent shifting towards inter-ethnic violence, see Duncan McDuie-Ra, *Civil Society, Democratization and the Search for Human Security: The Politics of the Environment, Gender, and Identity in Northeast India*, New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2009; Thongkholal Haokip "Inter-ethnic Relations in Meghalaya", *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2014), 302–316. See also Dinesh Wagle, "Khasi-Nepali Ethnic Conflict in Meghalaya, India" (08 June 2010), available at: http://blog.com.np/2010/06/08/khasi-nepali-ethnic-conflict-in-meghalaya-india/.

[2] More information can be found on the festival website, accessible at the film festival official website http://www.iffk.in.

[3] Dondor Lyngdoh, whilst compelled to pull out from the trilogy project by other work commitments, has continued shooting films in Khasi language and experimenting with filmmaking as a new way of writing social history. His last film, *Ka Lad* (a 26 minutes long feature), shot with another young Meghalaya filmmaker, Gautam Syiem, premiered in Shillong in 2013 and was recently screened at various Indian film festivals like the prestigious Goa's IFFI 2015, as part of a special selection celebrating North-eastern cinema. Janice Pariat is a well-known Khasi writer and journalist, currently residing in Delhi. She has

latters often portrayed as total aliens, hence usurpers of the economic and socio-political rights of the indigenous people, is at the root of the recurring conflicts Meghalaya has experienced over the last forty years. Despite the creation of new ethno-linguistic states, each of these geopolitical zones still contain inside their borders "non-ethnic polities [and] trans-ethnic clans".[6] The people belonging to these polities and clans are often perceived as outsiders or "infiltrators".[7] As Zygmunt Bauman has posited, the threat carried by the stranger "is more horrifying than that which one can fear from the enemy", because with the latter is still possible to have forms of "sociation", whilst with the stranger this is virtually impossible, as his social positioning "threatens the sociation itself – the very *possibility* of sociation".[8]

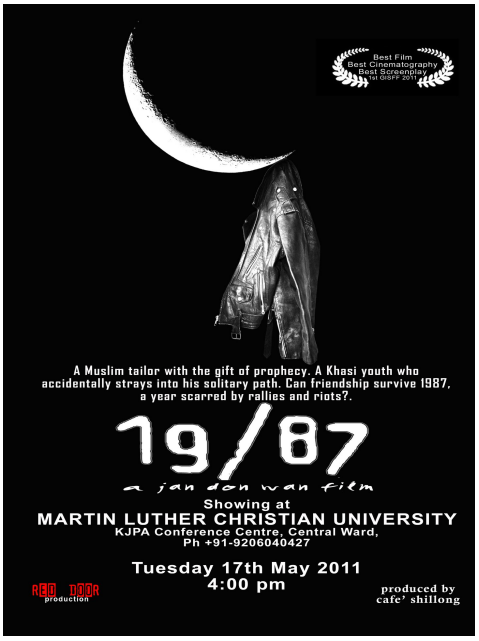

Fig. 1: *19/87*, poster of the film.

It is on this ambiguous threshold, marked by the slash in the title of the film, that the authors of *19/87* planned their work of art as a way of exploring the "very *possibility* of sociation" with a stranger, in order to challenge the widespread assumption that, in the case of a slippage of the stranger from the realm of the *outside* to the sphere of the *inside*, he/she should not be made, by necessity, an enemy, but rather "admitted into the self's life world, be counted, become and stay relevant" (ibid.) as a new friend. Hence, *19/87* takes an intimate look inside a *dkhar*'s house, in order to disprove a necessary repositioning of the stranger in the sphere of the enemy and explore a possibility of sociation with the outsider as a friend. The only film of the trilogy to have appeared so far,[9] *19/87* is an important work of social history that addresses the complex ambivalence of the stranger to an

authored a novel, *Sea Horse* (Random House India, December 2014), recently short-listed for the Hindu Lit Prize 2015, which presents "A thought-provoking meditation on time and love" (http://www.janicepariat.com). She also wrote many articles, poems and is a talented storyteller, her short stories having being collected in the book *Boats on Land* (Vintage Books/Random House India 2012) from where the extracts of *19/87* cited in this article are derived (Kindle format). Many of her writings discuss issues of identity in India's Northeast, *khasiness*, insiders/outsiders, and what she termed the "dkhar syndrome", the fear by tribals of the 'non-tribal' (derogatorily called *dkhar*), who is constantly constructed as a threat to the economy and presented as a menace to the local indigenous cultures. Pariat could not work on the shooting and the post-production of the film, but co-wrote the script with Wanphrang, subsequently publishing a homonymous short story.

Both Wanphrang Diengdoh and Janice Pariat come from a mixed family background, but make a strong point through their artistic productions to reject fixed notions of identity, whilst subscribing to their inner sense of belonging to the Khasi community. Wanphrang argues that, in the past, "Khasi Society Has Been More Accommodating of Outsiders Than It Is Today," underlining how it was possible to become part of a clan (like his great-grandfather had done, being a Bengali who had married into a Khasi family) through certain rituals sanctioned by customary laws.

For more details on Khasi matrilineal society, their marriage customs, and the changes occurring in modern times, see Nongkinrih, Aurelius Kyrham, *Khasi Society of Meghalaya: A Sociological Understanding*. Indus Publishing, 2002; Tiplut Nongbri, "Khasi Women and Matriliny: Transformations in Gender Relations", *Gender, Technology and Development*, vol. 4 (November 2000), 359-395; Madhumita Das, "Changing Family System among a Aatrilineal Group in India", *24th General Conference of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP)*, Salvador, Brazil. Retrieved from http://www. iussp. org/Brazil2001/s10/S12_04_Das.pdf.2001.

[4] As the filmmaker Wanphrang Diengdoh specifies, "In the film, the primary characters do not have a name. This is to keep in mind the number of people who have been victims of race issues in Shillong" (personal communication). Thus, throughout this article I have used the names that the author Janice Pariat attributed to the characters in the homonymous story adapted from the film. See '19/87', *Boats on Land* (Vintage Books/Random House India 2012).

[5] The word *dkhar*, which today can be used with a rather negative meaning to designate foreigners or simply non-tribals, originally was given to those individuals belonging to an adopted clan, that is, a clan that was created to incorporate those people who had created a family without adhering to the customary Khasi practices, marrying a non-Khasi person. "To distinguish them from the indigenous clans, such adopted clans are known under the

imaginary Khasiland. Rather than shooting a film which chronicled the riots in their violent outbursts, the authors chose a more reflexive and intimate approach to historical narrative, in order to deconstruct the artificial idea of a pure *khasiness*, where those who allegedly 'do-not-belong' are constantly placed in an ambiguous situation, born from the fact of inhabiting a Khasi polity and of sharing the territory as a minority among a Khasi demographical majority. "In the present ethnic context of Northeast India," as Philippe Ramirez elaborated, "identities tend to be exclusive".[10] The film *19/87* challenges this affirmation of exclusivity, forcing the audience to evaluate from a different perspective whether the stranger should be made into the ultimate, irredeemable, enemy, or whether he could be trusted by, and even welcomed in, the community as a friend. Friendship is thus posited as the only viable path to address the political conundrum that is Meghalaya today, with its recurring ethnic and inter-ethnic clashes that, as Pariat (2013) has put it, "[e]very decade ... generated a fresh *dkhar* to reckon with".[11]

Looking at *19/87* as an experimental film that opens up new venues for addressing history on film as a challenging form of "historiophoty",[12] this paper looks at indigenous practices of literary and visual writing as powerful sites of resistance and possible innovative ways for "historying".[13]

Storytelling and Filmmaking to Raise Political Consciousness

> Often at night... there were stones thrown on his roof, shouts resounding in the street – *'Dkhar liah, mih na Shillong.'* You bastard outsider, get out of Shillong. These were the things, thought Suleiman, that weren't reported in newspapers.
> (Janice Pariat, *19/87*, from *Boats on Land*)[14]

The story of Suleiman-the *dorji* (tailor) was created to resurrect the memory of a dramatic event that Wanphrang Diengdoh witnessed when he was a small child. In 1987, Meghalaya experienced a recrudescence of the violent riots that had scarred the land in 1979. Arson and attacks were again directed against the *dkhars*. During the demonstrations, led by some Khasi student groups and political leaders, the Khasis burned down an entire neighbourhood. At the time, Diengdoh, being just a small child, had been incapable of making sense of the tragedy. However, the memory of it stayed with him: "The film was an attempt to make sense of it".[15] As such, it is an effort to engage with the past and with "some socialist utopian ideas". In this sense, *19/87* can be understood as an experiment in social history or, as the filmmaker put it, as a work that undertakes "a revisionist approach to tribal history", with the determination to "break free from stereotypes".

As we have briefly hinted in the introduction, *19/87* is constructed as the story of a 'fortunate encounter': it narrates the friendship between Banri, a Khasi worker addicted to gambling and fond of alcohol, and Suleiman, an Indian Muslim *dorji* (tailor) whose only passion lies in flying kites. Whilst functional to the profiling of

general tittle [*sic*], the Dkhar clan. But to designate their identity among themselves, many of them use the prefix Khar before their acquired or adopted name.... The word Dkhar is used by the Khasi for people inhabiting the plains area near their (Khasi) territory hence the common title Dkhar". In this sense, the term was not necessarily a derogatory one, as Diengdoh also clarifies: "in fact there are many Khasi clans with the same title as well. The context of the conversation or the political mileu in which the word is used defines its character" (personal communication). See also Valentina Pakyntein, "The Khasi Clan: Changing Religion and Its Effect" (2010), 354. Available at: http://dspace.nehu.ac.in/handle/1/2042
See also Tiplut, Nongbri, "Problems of Matriliny: A Short Review of the Khasi Kinship Structure", *Journal of NEICSSR*, 8.8 (1984), 6.

[6] Philippe Ramirez, "Belonging to the Borders Uncertain Identities in Northeast India", in Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka and Gérard Toffin, eds., *The Politics of Belonging in the Himalayas: Local Attachments and Boundary Dynamics. Governance, Conflict, and Civic Action* (Delhi: Sage Publications India, 2011), 77-97.

[7] Regarding the issue of migration from neighbouring countries to Northeast India, the derogatory label of "infiltrators" has been adopted especially in regard of Bangladeshi migrants who try to make their way to India through the porous long border between Bangladesh and the Northeast. Whilst the police forces on both side of the border are known for having committed many atrocious crimes against the so-called 'infiltrators', the influx of migrants has known no arrest. This has often fuelled resentment and fear on the side of the tribal populations, a perennial feeling of being under siege and at threat of loosing not just the land, but language, culture and customs as well. Such anxiety and fear of the 'infiltrator' has spread all over the Northeast and it is documented by the name of "Tripura Syndrome", which Duncan McDuie-Ra (2009) defines as the fear of being assimilated, and ultimately destroyed, by non-tribals moving to tribal lands: "The fate of the tribal population of Tripura is a powerful symbol in the 'outsiders' discourse simply because the tribal population has been completely overrun by 'outsiders' (ibid., 69). These outsiders, in the national discourse, are usually termed 'infiltrators'. Willem Van Schendel (2000: 33) explains that "[t]he language of infiltration first surfaced in official discourse when, in 1962, the Indian government in parliamentary debates identified immigrants in Tripura and Assam as infiltrators and proceeded to expel them". Since then, the word "infiltration" has been repeatedly adopted to discuss the migration inflow into India, especially from Bangladesh.
As Sanjoy Bhardwaj (see bibliographical reference at the end of this note) has pointed out, migration of Bangladeshis into India, especially into Assam and Tripura, has led to numerous clashes, most of which revolve around the land and language issues. The resentment of the Bengalis in Tripura has led to even greater violence than in Assam, perhaps because of the fact that the original majority communities of Tripura have now been reduced to

the characters, all these attributes, far from defining the identities of these two common, and yet quite special, characters, should be read as clarifiers of a determined social positioning inside the Khasi society. Suleiman performs as a 'Muslim' 'Indian' 'tailor' and Banri as a 'Khasi' 'tribal' 'worker', but the story of their friendship exposes the fraudulence of essentialist identitarian markers and the dangers inherent to forms of racial profiling. Whilst the film unfolds, the audience is confronted with the complexity of these two young men's lives during the terrible times of the 1987 riots. The identity label is shown to be purposeful to a certain type of racist discourse that favours the construction of fixed identities. Essentializing discourses of identity and diversity, it reifies a far from real dichotomy between the people 'who belong' to the land and the 'others', the unapprehendable ones, cast as archetypes of perpetual 'strangers' – the *dkhars*.

In the specific case of Shillong, the political manipulation of the ethnic discourse and the complexity of the migration question have created an intricate scenario. In the absence of a genuine political will to find a sustainable solution, the gravity of the issues at stake (like the real poverty of some sectors of the indigenous population and their consequent disenfranchisement) has ignited an almost perennial state of 'civil war', often led by ethno-nationalist leaders who point at the non-tribals as *the only* problem to be addressed.[16] These politics of race, as Paul Gilroy has argued, are difficult to eradicate or subvert: "For many racialized populations, 'race' and the hard-won, oppositional identities it supports are not to be lightly or prematurely given up".[17]

Polarized by lexicon and by praxis, the only way out from this dramatic situation is the invention of creative venues of dialogue, which can unveil the fault lines along which binary positions of insiders/outsiders have been constructed, envisioning innovative strategies for addressing people's grievances on both sides of the threshold.

> Are true Khasis only those who remain unconverted, speak the language (or one of its many dialects) and hold Khasi parentage? ... Surely it couldn't be as narrowly delineated as that. Even with an ancestry as mixed as mine – Portuguese, British, Khasi and Jaintia – I still consider myself Khasi and the language my mother tongue.
> (Janice Pariat, *A Gap in the Clouds*)

In order to dismantle this process of 'otherisation', it is necessary to provide more complex and critical historical fictions, capable of deflating stereotypical notions of 'insiders' (*khasis*) and 'outsiders' (*dkhars*). How can we deconstruct these biased discourses of belonging/not-belonging, insider-ness/outsider-ness, tribal/non-tribal? Can a film or a literary narration adequately address issues as complex as the ones related to identity and culture? As Pariat posits, these are far from simple questions:

minorities. According to a report, there are two million voters whose names had been deleted from the voter list of Bangladesh during 1991-95. These data have been reported by other scholars as well, with Hazarika writing that Bangladesh itself had admittedly reported to the Supreme Court of India that "no less than 1.2 million Bangladeshis who had visited the state on valid visas between 1972 and 1996 had 'vanished' from records" (Hazarika 2000, Kindle location 1495). See Willem van Schendel, "Repatriates? Infiltrators? Trafficked Humans? Cross-border Migrants in Bengal", *SARWATCH*, 2.2 (December 2000), 30-63; Sanjoy Hazarika, *Rites of Passage. Border Crossing, Imagined Homelands, India's East and Bangladesh* (Delhi: Penguin India, 2000, Kindle Format); Sanjay Bhardwaj, "Illegal Bangladeshi Migration: Evaluating India-Bangladesh Approaches", *Claws Jornal* (Winter 2014), 59-76. Available in pdf from the URL: www.claws.in/images/journals_doc/2042080227_SanjayBhardwaj.pdf.

[8] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 53-54.

[9] The film was financed by two businessmen who run Café Shillong, a B&B and a popular coffee bar that hosts art and music events in the city of Shillong. As Wanphrang Diengdoh clarified during a Skype interview (Nov. 2014), there were serious financial constraints to be overcome in order to make three films and realise the complete trilogy. Even for small budget and experimental features, the costs were relevant for the three young artists who had set their minds on the project. It was extremely difficult to find the sponsors, leave aside a production company. Finally, they walked in the office of the managers of Café Shillong and exposed their idea. They were given 36,000 rupees (around 600 dollars) as production money. When solicited, some time later, to explain why they had consented to sponsor the trilogy, the businessmen ironically replied: "Because we believed in two freaks who wanted to make a trilogy ... and we wanted to see what it would come out from it!" Diengdoh's statements are based on an interview conducted via Skype and recorded with the filmmaker's consent (4th November 2014).

[10] Ramirez, "Belonging to the Borders Uncertain Identities in Northeast India", 91.

[11] Janice Pariat, "Insiders/Outsiders" (2013).

[12] "Historiophoty", according to the definition given by Hayden White in 1988, is "the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse". See Hayden White, "Historiography and Historiophoty", *American Historical Review*, Vol. 93 (December 1988), 1193.

[13] See Alan Munslow, "Fiction, Imagination and the Fictive: The Literary Aesthetics of Historying", in Alexander Lyon Macfie, ed., *The Fiction of History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 31-40.

[14] Pariat, "19/87", Kindle location 1214.

> Does identity then end at borders? And begins anew beyond an invisible line. What about those who travel to the land and stay? The ones who love its lilting language, speak it like a local and understand its nuances? Is identity not formed by the tactility of words? By an attachment to a place?
> ...
> Can the soul of a people be captured on sheets of paper? Can it survive the endless stamp of bureaucracy? I wonder whether identity is homogeneous and remains unchanged by experience....
>
> (Janice Pariat, *A Gap in the Clouds*)[18]

Whilst discussing the complex positioning of the Khasi Muslims of Meghalaya, often seen as some sort of strange creatures that have stubbornly chosen to belong despite the limits imposed by codified ethnic and religious lines, Pariat again interrogates her readership with the central question: "What does it mean to be a Khasi?" (ibid.) She herself provides a very thought-provoking answer that refuses to close the debate once and for all, but rather aims at triggering further discussion: "All and nothing. It may not exist. Perhaps a person finds her identity by just identifying" (ibid.).

Identifying, though, requires an effort at mastering the cultural forms and the skills to control the rules of the game. As Bourdieu has pointed out, "[i]n order to make sure you are on the right side of the authorities, you have to have rule, adversaries and game at your fingertips".[19] This sophisticated ability to play the game "up to the limits" is exactly what allows Suleiman to survive in an otherwise highly dangerous environment. Since he needs to constantly renegotiate the limits and the boundaries of his existence, to define the rules of the game to make sure he has got them under control, he measures every step and every word, with the calculated attention he adopts when flying his kite. Standing on the roof, inside the city of Shillong, and yet emblematically beyond the thresholds and the public places of the city, kite-flyers like Suleiman seem to live in a hyper-reality where a war is fought everyday by kite-warriors manoeuvred by skilled "masters of forms" (ivi).

> Kite warriors wage a faceless war.
> In the city, on rooftops and terraces and small open car parks,
> the enemy is hidden, concealed at the other hand of the string,
> probing the sky with slim, curving weapons.
>
> (Janice Pariat, *19/87*)[20]

Rooftops, terraces and car parks are the only places where Suleiman can play a different role, where he can *engage*, confronting his enemies and carving his own space of belonging. Compelled to enact the part of the *dkhar*, Suleiman perpetually looks for a possibility to escape and, simultaneously, for a way to be accepted by the community he almost surreptitiously inhabits. He ends up adapting to the form of the invisible, or barely visible, "outsider/*within*", in order to navigate a space that

[15] All the quotations from Wanphrang Diengdoh are based on an interview conducted via Skype and recorded with the filmmaker's consent (4th November 2014). Other information on the film and the ideas behind it are based on various e-mail and Facebook messages exchanged between the film director and the author of this article.

[16] Among the most vocal and militant political groups active in Meghalaya there is the Khasi Students' Union (KSU). Founded in 1978, the KSU is certainly the main agent fuelling the discourses of 'outsiders' and of ethno-nationalism in Meghalaya. Whilst the KSU started with a manifesto which declared the protection of Khasi language and culture as its main aim, the group became more and more involved in acts of violence and atrocities against other tribals and non-tribals alike. As H. Srikhant writes, "KSU's hegemonic role had shrunk the democratic space for the rise of other organisations within the state. It was during KSU's agitation of 2001 that Meghalayan civil society demonstrated an acceptance of liberal democratic ideas by criticising KSU's ethnocentric agenda" ("Prospects of Liberal Democracy in Meghalaya: A Study of Civil Society's Response to KSU-Led Agitation", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XL, No. 32 [2005]). This indicates that there is a part of the Khasi society that does not approve of KSU's political agenda and of its violent methods to achive it. Writers and artists have been at the forefront of a counter-discourse that, while recognizing the importance of language and cultural practices, notwithstanding condemns the narrow-minded definition of ethnicity and khasiness as a divisive lines between insiders and outsiders to the community. See Srikhant, "Prospects of Liberal Democracy in Meghalaya", 3987-3993.

[17] Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge: Harvard U. P., 2000), 12.

[18] Janice Pariat, "'A Gap in the Clouds': Of Khasi Muslims in Meghalaya", in Janice Pariat's Blog (21 May 2012). Accessible online at http://180.179.160.21/group-blog/The-North-East-Blog/3290/a-gap-in-the-clouds-of-khasi-muslims-in-meghalaya/63519.html.

[19] Pierre Bourdieu, "Codification", *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford U. P., 1987), 78.

[20] Janice Pariat, '19/87'. *Boats of Land: A Collection of Short Stories*, Kindle version (New Delhi and London: Random House India, 2012), 1158.

is always pregnant with potential violence. The "outsider/*within*", a concept developed by Patricia Collins[21] for addressing questions of gender and race, could be applied to investigate the issue of insiders and outsiders to the Khasi society as portrayed in *19/87*. Like the typical "outsider/*within"*, who performs according to certain rules dictated by the insiders in order to be granted the privilege of inhabiting this contested 'within', Suleiman acts his identity of stranger limiting his interactions with the world outside his house to the minimum. Forced in the position of the subaltern without any agency or voice, he survives navigating invisible paths, avoiding contact with the Khasis who expect from him 'a life apart'. The insiders' laws police any social interaction: the breach of such norms of behavior, or a failure to comply with the expected performance of the outsider's identity, may generate terrible consequences, which are made clear when Pariat briefly describes Suleiman's attraction for Christine, his neighbour tribal girl who occasionally flirted with him.

[21] Developed in her works on gender and race, the term "outsider/within" was originally employed to describe the location of individuals that inhabit the border spaces between different groups and, as such, are positioned in such an ambivalent space that they end up being deprived of any clear membership to any one group. See Patricia Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought", *Social Problems*, 33.6 (1986), 14-32; *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); "Reflections on the Outsider Within", *Journal of Career Development*, 26.1 (1999), 85-89.

> He ought to get Christine off his mind. He'd be accused of stealing Khasi women away from their men. And who knew what might happen then. At the moment, it was manageable, leaving his house only if he had to, stocking up on food for weeks at a stretch.
> (Janice Pariat, *19/87*, 1209)

As Rogers and Hoover have further elaborated, "the more one thinks of oneself as an outsider/*within*, the more a person might tend to enact those realities associated with outsiderhood within a given organization".[22] Such practice of alienation is usually not sufficient to "remove the conditions that made a defense necessary in the first place" (ibid., 5). Hence, it might be paradoxically more fruitful to struggle against those conditions of enforced alienation (ibid.). Rogers and Hoover thus posit that the concept of outsider/*within* should be abandoned in favor of a more belligerent subject: the "in/outsider". The in/outsider is an individual who recognizes his condition of subalternity, but decides to fight back, in order to change his social positioning and render "the outsider/within a person who is *in* the organization but not *of* it" (ibid.; emphasis in the original).

[22] Mary F. Rogers and Kathy McKibben Hoover, "Outsiders/Within and In/Outsiders: Varieties of Multiculturalism", *Journal of Educational Controversy*, 5.2 (2010), 1-9. Available at: http://cedar.wwu.edu/jec/vol5/iss2/5, accessed 20 October 2015.

In *19/87*, Suleiman performs this crucial shifting from an individual who has so far acted the role of the outsider/within, having internalised a "practical logic"[23] that allows him to survive in such hostile environment, to the position of the in/outsider, who still acknowledges his precarious social positioning and yet acts defiantly through his friendship with a Khasi. This alienated character has learned to read volatile signs, sniffing the danger as a stray dog used to eking out a living by seizing chances and avoiding hazards. His field of action, especially when outside the safe space of his house, is full of "vagueness and indeterminacy" (ivi). He must be able to operate "a *diacrisis*, a judgement which separates" in order to distinguish "what is important from what is not".[24] Both as an outsider/within and an

[23] Bourdieu, "Codification", 77.

[24] Ibid., 79.

in/outsider, Suleiman has to master the capacity of quickly discerning a dangerous situation from a safe one, and perform accordingly. He can hardly allow himself to *be* his 'real' self, except when he is alone, in the solitude of his small house. However, in the relationship with Banri, he finds a new way of defying alienation: Suleiman recognizes in Banri an ally in his fight against racism and terror, a *friend* who is keen to cross the threshold and break the *dkhar*'s claustrophobic dimension of separateness.

Both in the film and in the short story, the life of Suleiman is mostly portrayed inside his little tidy room, where all the elements are arranged to tell us of a young Muslim man who is apparently very quiet, hardworking, with a simple lifestyle.In the written narrative by Pariat, where the images are evocated by words, we also get a close view of Suleiman's thoughts, such as the anxiety verging on paranoid fear that he feels when he steps out of his house, into a public sphere where his identity of non-tribal is constantly under scrutiny:

> He was nervous today, more than usually on edge after he returned from the market. A group of Khasi youth had followed him, or so he thought. Or they could have been going somewhere the same way. It was hard to tell. He'd walked a convoluted route back home, and eventually lost them in the crowd. It wasn't getting easier, he thought. How much longer could he... Suddenly, someone rapped softly on the door.
> (Janice Pariat, *19/87*, 1357)

The passage well exposes the degree of constant terror that Suleiman experiences as a member of a 'non-tribal' community living in the capital city of Meghalaya. The sense of insecurity that recurrent riots[25] unleash on the non-tribal community is synthetically conveyed by Suleiman's thought "how much longer could he...", which is abruptly interrupted by somebody knocking at his door. This is a crucial moment: Suleiman seems to be on the verge of deciding to leave Shillong, as many other non-tribals had done, following quit notices and forced evacuations.[26] The character of Suleiman, as Diengdoh reveals, is actually inspired by the true story of a Muslim tailor who was shot dead in the streets of Shillong during the 1987 riots. Therefore, despite being a completely invented, fictitious character, Suleiman is a "true invention",[27] as he embodies a real person whose dramatic death actually occurred. The way Suleiman-the *dorji* is portrayed in the film is also very telling of the authorial choices made by the filmmaker: he is presented as a quiet, disciplined, simple-dressed Muslim, who wears a traditional white *shalwar kameez* despite tailoring rather fashionable clothes for his tribal neighbours. His way of dressing deeply contrasts with the 'modern' clothes sported by Banri, the Khasi youth. Banri is always shown wearing a pair of jeans, a black leather jacket and dark sunglasses. As Diengdoh explained to me, this way of dressing is an equivalent of a fashion statement, a way of asserting a precise 'identity'. When we see Barni for the first time, he is combing his hair in front of a

[25] During the 1970s and the 1980s, various incidents occurred in Shillong, where non-tribals were targeted by tribals and incited to leave the State. The years 1979 and 1987, in particular, witnessed violent riots and attacks against 'outsiders'. As Lyngdoh and Gassah (2003: 5025) report: "In all these incidents, the non-tribal community was always at the receiving end. Anti-social elements would resort to stone throwing, arson and even assaults on innocent victims. The violent attacks were carried out especially in the sensitive areas of the city and would gradually spread to neighboring areas". See C. Reuben Lyngdoh, and L. S. Gassah, "Decades of Inter-Ethnic Tension", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38.48 (Nov. 29 - Dec. 5, 2003), 5024-5026.

[26] During the 1987 riots, for example, an estimated 4,000 non-tribals flew to find shelter in relief camps (ibid.). Among them were people belonging to different ethnic and religious backgrounds: some were new migrants, but many others were Bengali-speaking or Nepali-speaking families who had been living in Shillong for generations.

[27] Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film, Film on History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), xix.

mirror, he is enacting what a popular local saying recites as "Leather jacket, comb in back pocket and goggles in eye socket". He behaves with great arrogance, especially when he enters Suleiman's room, occupying it with poses of self-importance and overconfidence. Suleiman's home represents quite another world: it is like a protected microcosm that constitutes not just a safe space, but also the miniature of a carefully reconstructed lost world, where fading memories are constantly kept alive and cherished as (im)possible places of return. These are forms of a "prosthetic memory", as Alison Landsberg has defined it:

> [A] new form of memory ... [where] the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person's subjectivity and politics.[28]

[28] Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia U. P., 2004), 2.

Suleiman does not belong to anywhere else, as he will tell Banri during a conversation, having come to Shillong when he was just two years old. He does not have any memory of the place of his father and ancestors: prosthetic memory equips him with a reminiscence of an *elsewhere* that comes to him mediated through his father's old radio. His father had often told him that they were strangers to Meghalaya, and thus the locals called them 'outsiders': "We are what they call dkhars".[29] And yet he feels at home only in Shillong, even if amidst fear and loneliness, as the *other India* is just a reflection of his father's narratives of a somewhere where none of them ever cherished a wish to return. Suleiman observes the outside world of the city from his window and from the roof of his tiny hut, lives frugally and quietly, as "[t]he cluster of Muslim families living in the area rapidly grew smaller".[30] He is neither keen to wear the straitjacket of the *dkhar*, nor to bear its repressive consequences:

[29] Pariat, *19/87*, 1185.

[30] Pariat, *19/87*, 2012.

> He was tempted to walk up to a member of the KSU[31] and say, 'I've been in Shillong for a long time. I'm thirty-four years old and I came here before some of you were even born.' He snapped a line of thread between his teeth. All he wanted to do was fly a kite.[32]

[31] KSU is the acronym for 'Khasi Students Union', a group that has been active for more than 30 years in Shillong and other areas of Meghalaya. They are often behind the riots that target 'dkhars' and their shops, houses and properties: "Non-tribals, including tourists, were assaulted during the course of the procession that passed through the main streets of the hill station to 'celebrate' the 35th anniversary of the KSU. Shops belonging to non-indigenous people were also vandalized". See 'NGOs condemn Khasi Students' Union violence 'published on the *Times of India* (7th April 2013). Available at http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/NGOs-condemn-Khasi-Students-Union-violence/articleshow/19422958.cms.

Beside flying his kite, Suleiman also wants to go beyond that definition that has frozen him in the ambivalent condition of the 'stranger'. As Pariat describes in the story, the Khasis come by to have new dresses made by the *dorji,* or old ones fixed. They call him simply *dorji*, 'tailor', and never address him with his proper name. He is a shadowy presence to be kept at a distance, an invisible someone who belongs to the realm of the *outside*, a condition which adds to his loneliness and sense of a life apart:

[32] Pariat, *19/87*, 1203.

> Despite the small town he lived in ripping itself apart, people, outsiders or not, still dropped by to have things mended. Although that was all they did. Especially the Khasis.[33]

[33] Pariat, *19/87*, Kindle location 1190.

As he works at his sewing machine, Suleiman often gazes outside the window, leaving his thoughts free to fly, like his kite, from the depths of anger and frustration for having being turned into an 'outsider' in his own land, to the sweet realms of romance when his eyes meet the figure of Christine. But anger and frustration seem to be more acute and present than the romantic dreams of love he interrupts as quickly as they emerge, snapping off a loose thread with his teeth.

Interestingly, the character of Christine – only mentioned once in the short story by Pariat – is completely absent in the film, a choice that Wanphrang Diengdoh describes as absolutely conscious and deliberate: "I just don't feel in the position to have a woman on film, to really understand the position of a tribal woman in the tribal society".[34] He thus preferred to leave female characters out of the frame of *19/87*, in order to focus the attention on the relationship between Banri and Suleiman, a tribal and a non-tribal, as possible friends in a political environment where such a bond is constructed as unlikely, undesirable, almost *impossible*.

[34] In a very interesting personal communication, the filmmaker Diengdoh further pointed out: "Also, the film being produced by people who were not really film producers, allowed me to say exactly what I wanted without bending down perhaps to the pressures of commissioned editors. The idea that India was soon entering into a Neo liberal market in the next 3 years and looking at how "tribal" spaces would now have their demography more defined on economic lines was something I was keen to look into. I did not want to romanticise the idea of these two characters finding comfort 'oh so easily' in some unattainable tangible love but stress more on how 'market spaces' are essentially aggressive spaces where the need to foster bonds also creates oppositions. And this is what is interesting that commerce or a desire to speculate in markets (which is what *teer* is at its essence- betting) can either bring people together or make them enemies".

The friendship that slowly and unpredictably matures between the two young characters shows a virtual trespassing of the borderline that normally cuts Suleiman off from the local community as a stranger. It is in the casual encounter with Banri, first as an unwelcomed customer who invades Suleiman's shop to request a service, then as an imposed guest whose expectations Suleiman has to do his best to satisfy, then as an acquaintance who comes by from time to time, and finally as a 'friend' with whom Suleiman spends a night drinking, chatting and sharing dreams and fears. This last shifting of the relationship constitutes the turning point of the film and the short story alike. In Pariat's story, the two young men are shown sharing a simple meal, drinking some alcohol and listening to an old radio, which Suleiman has inherited from his father, a little souvenir of a far-away India that reaches them only through the cracks of the radio's old loudspeakers and some Hindi songs. They strike up a conversation:

> Banri: 'From where did you come?'
>
> Suleiman: 'Lucknow... in Uttar Pradesh. You know where that is?
>
> Banri: 'Yes, of course. Near Bihar. Now drink.' Banri slugged his alcohol like most other hardened drinkers in town. A few quick, neat gulps.
>
> Suleiman followed, albeit slower.
>
> Banri: 'You came so long ago... why didn't you go back?'
>
> Suleiman: 'My father didn't want to. He said our old hometown was filled with sad memories, and this was a fresh, new start.' He took a sip. 'My mother died when I was born.'
>
> Banri: 'Ei, sorry to hear that.'
>
> Suleiman shrugged. 'I didn't know her at all. I didn't even miss her.'

> Banri: 'You've been around here longer than me.' Banri poured himself a refill.
>
> Suleiman: 'That might be true but it makes no difference; people still throw stones at my house.' Suleiman gulped his drink. His eyes were slightly glazed. 'They call me all sorts of names... bastard outsider.'[35]

[35] Pariat, *19/87*, 1391.

The scene takes a very intimate take in the film, as Banri becomes tipsy and starts pouring out words accompanied by generous refills of alcohol. It is at this moment that he, as the local tribal entitled to belong, addresses the question of identity and the violent politics that surround it. Banri confesses his unwillingness at targeting 'outsiders' as a legitimate or even useful way of addressing tribal grievances over lack of jobs and loss of land:

> [Banri, talking about Khasi Student Union]: 'People keep asking me why I don't join KSU...that it's a cause for our tribe. They think... I see it in their eyes when they look at me... they think if I don't then somehow I'm not a real Khasi, you know? He shrugged. 'I mean I see their point and all – we don't own any businesses here, or hold important government positions... but I don't know,' – he struggled with his words – 'if this is the right way... fighting, *beh dkhar*... chasing outsiders out of Shillong.' He pointed his glass at Suleiman.[36]

[36] Pariat, *19/87*, 1412.

The conversation reaches a climax: the ambiguity of their situation, which casts both of them as virtual enemies to each other, is resolved by the realization that they share more than they had imagined. Most of all, they cherish the same love for the city of Shillong, this invisible but very present character of the narrative. Shillong is like a beautiful woman they both love and dream about, 'protected' by self-appointed guardians of her virtues who impede her lovers to be with her. When Banri asks Suleiman why he simply does not go back, since he has *another* place to call home, Suleiman states that there is no other place to go back and to call home. There is no land where to return: the people who have been forced to leave their houses have landed in relief camps, no-man's lands that can hardly be made into a home. Suleiman, as much as Banri, considers Shillong his own city, and Meghalaya his own land:

> The tailor struck a match and lit his *beedi*. 'That's the problem. I don't really have anywhere to go. I was two when we came to Shillong. I thought it was the most beautiful place on earth.'
>
> Banri: 'It is.'
>
> For a while they sat in silence and smoked.[38]

[38] Pariat, *19/87*, 1417.

Banri, made perhaps more sensitive and sympathetic to the plight of Suleiman by realising his own sense of helplessness and lack of choice, remains silent. The night swallows their pain and their frustration, bringing them close to each other in the realisation that both live quite alienated lives that do not acquire any more

meaning in embracing a rigid and artificial identity mask. Through the birth of their friendship, however, something seems to be almost overcome: the complete sense of loneliness and apartness that they had experienced so far seems to dissolve as dew at the first lights of the sunshine. In the morning, we see Banri happily strolling the lanes of Shillong, searching for Suleiman to tell him he has won betting the numbers that Suleiman suggested him to play. As the camera pans, we see Suleiman cheerfully playing with his kite on a roof. The film ends with a symbolic shot of Banri extending his hand to Suleiman and asking him to join him for a meal. Suleiman, in return, extends his hand and the frame is frozen, followed by images of the two friends eating together, whilst superimposed images of the riots, as reported on the Indian newspapers, tinge their cheerful faces with red colour and remind the viewers of the tragedy that still looms on Shillong.

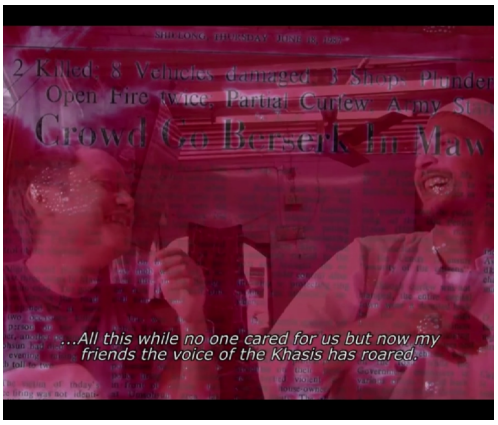

Fig. 2: A still from the film *19/87*.

Janice Pariat, describing the same final scenes, gives us an introspective insight into Suleiman's mind. He is indulging in his favourite activity: playing with his kite on the roof of his house. The fear and the anger seem to recede as he leaves his thoughts to follow the movements of his dancing kite:

> He remembered something his father once told him, that the kite held the soul of the person who flew it. 'What does than mean, abba?' he'd asked, and his father had replied, 'What you feel flows through the string.'[39]

[39] Pariat, *19/87*, 1458.

Suleiman is still dizzy from the night before, his kite is still uncertain and he perhaps feels not completely at ease in his new dimension of 'friend'. But then, confined as he is to the little square ground of the roof, "while kites prowled above him like birds of prey", Suleiman decides to give hope a chance and fights back:

> [T]his time, helped by a nifty breeze, the kite lifted. Soon, it was swooping through the air like a delighted bird. He laughed. Perhaps this is what his father

> had meant – that the kite mimicked his gladness. It flew higher, leaving the rest behind. Some of the smaller kites challenged him to a duel, but the battles didn't last more than a few minutes. He was invincible. Finally, a large kite rose in the air and swirled around his.[40]

[40] Pariat, *19/87*, 1468.

This is the decisive battle: the large kite, perhaps a symbol of his biggest fear, looks threatening as ever, but this time Suleiman is not doomed to give up so easily as he is equipped with a new weapon: friendship. He chases the giant kite until "with some luck, he pulled and a line snapped, the other kite dropped".

Suleiman brings his own kite down, "fluttering like a breathless bird". The town in front of him looks "coy and peaceful". This is the moment when Banri arrives and calls him to descend from the roof and go to eat something to a "good Muslim restaurant". Pariat describes for a moment the fearful thoughts of Suleiman about walking around Shillong in a day when a rally had been announced. Would he be able to win, in a real battle not consigned to his brave and valiant kite? The stretched hand of Banri is perhaps what convinces him to descend from the roof:

> How long could it go? And this evening, for some reason, he felt as though the town was his own.... He was ready, even in the smallest possible way, to reclaim it.
>
> That night, before going to bed, Suleiman once again climbed to the roof. Without his kite....[41]

[41] Pariat, *19/87*, 1490.

Suleiman is still aware of the possible dangers, but he seems determined to face them from a different "positionality":[42] he has shifted from the alienated social positioning of an 'outsider/within' to that of a more hopeful and resilient 'in/outsider', thanks to the more intimate place he has acquired in the Khasi community: the place of a 'friend'.

[42] I adopt the word 'positionality' in the way Floya Anthias has designated it, as a concept that "addresses issues of identity in terms of locations which are not fixed but are context, meaning and time related and which therefore involve shifts and contradictions" (2008: 5). As Anthias elaborated, such "intersectional frame ... moves away from the idea of given 'groups' or 'categories' of gender, ethnicity and class, which then intersect ... and instead pays much more attention to *social locations and processes* which are broader than those signalled by this" (ibid.) The concept of positionality adds complexity to issues of collective identity construction, unpacking the intersectional dimensions of particular social positionings and the "narratives of location" that sustain them. Floya Anthias, "Thinking Through the Lens of Translocational Positionality: an Intersectionality Frame for Understanding Identity and Belonging", *Translocations,* Vol. 4, Issue 1 (Winter 2008), 5-20. See also Floya Anthias, "Where Do I belong? Narrating Collective Identity and Translocational Positionality", *Ethnicities*, vol. 2, no. 4 (2002), 491-515.

Indigenous New Waves: Film and Literature as Social History

Based on historical events and verisimilar characters, *19/87* is a film that can be placed at the crossroads between fiction and documentary, where a reappraisal of the past is tried out through an *invented* story of a *real* fact. Well received both at festivals outside the region and during the various screenings held in Shillong, the film has been considered by some critics and journalists as "the birth of the Khasi New Wave":

> [W]e take great pride in announcing ... the birth of Khasi New Wave. Khasi New Wave draws inspiration from stories of the streets, depicting Shillong as it really is or was without omitting the unpleasant side of this beautiful hill station.[43]

[43] See the official website of the film trilogy at the URL: www.shillongtrilogy.com.

Whilst the authors of the film did not consciously devise it to be a 'new wave'

work, Diengdoh acknowledges that *19/87* is indeed very different from the rest of the Khasi cinema. Admitting that it presents a *new way* of making cinema in the Khasi language – as opposed to the majority of the films produced in Meghalaya, which mostly try to imitate Bollywood – *19/87* "speaks another kind of truth", as it exploits to its advantage the richness of Khasi imagery, exploring the way different cultures read and interpret visual images.

Whether we wish to consider it as a film suffused by the ethos of the Nouvelle Vague, or rather see it as an oppositional, alternative way of conceiving the role of the feature film genre in the land of Bollywood, what remains unquestionable is the dimension of innovation and the degree of experimentation that its author Diengdoh contributed to the debate on indigenous filmmaking from Northeast India. As Rosenstone has posited when discussing the "opposition or innovative historical" films,

> [These works] are, at the same time, part of a search for a new vocabulary in which to render the past on the screen, an effort to make history (depending upon the film) more complex, interrogative, and self-conscious, a matter of tough, even unanswerable questions rather than of slick stories. The best of these films propose new strategies for dealing with the traces of the past, strategies that point towards new forms of historical thought, forms that need not be limited to the screen, but might, with necessary alterations due to the medium, be carried back to the printed page.[44]

[44] Rosenstone, *History on Film, Film on History*, 20.

Albeit navigating complex cultural and linguistic landscapes, indigenous films and literatures contribute significantly to this quest for a new vocabulary, creating new ways of writing the past through experimental formats that can be regarded as new waves in the production of critical historical thought. The filmic and written texts of *19/87* are narratives which, despite the intervention of the artists' imagination (or perhaps thanks to it), put forward "new strategies for dealing with the traces of the past" (ibid.). In doing so, these literary and cinematic narrations pave alternative paths to re-apprehend history, recurring to the tradition of orality and to ancient modes of storytelling in order to create, via new media, challenging and innovative forms of grassroots historiography and "historiophoty" (White 1988).

On India's specific engagement with social history and experimental filmmaking, Anirudh Deshpande[45] has elaborated:

> [A] 'new wave' film without being a 'period' film often becomes an excellent example of a historical film. Recreation of human feelings in realistic social situations – like the ones involving the exercise of power and exploitation – is more important to these films than a 'period' look. However this does not mean that the directors of these films do not pay adequate attention to historical details.

[45] Anirudh Deshpande, *Class, Power & Consciousness in Indian Cinema & Television* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2009), 66.

Further debating whether or not we should consider *19/87* as the 'birth of the Khasi New Wave' since there was no manifesto as such that the authors subscribed to while devising and shooting the film, it could be important to underline how the new waves in cinema have become a global phenomenon, currently under scrutiny by scholars of cultural and media studies. James Tweedie, in his recent work *The Age of New Waves: Art Cinema and the Staging of Globalization*, has argued:

> The proliferation of new waves on the international art house and film festival circuits is one of the few cinematic phenomena from the past half century with a global reach that rivals the geographic range and ambition of Hollywood.... [T]hese movements are best understood not as isolated events but as a series of interlaced moments, as an alternative vision of global modernity, and as an opening onto the "world" promised in the phrase "world cinema." The new waves surface as one dimension of the visual culture of accelerated modernization, and they accompany a sequence of urban, youth, and consumer revolutions whose universe of reference points and comparisons inevitably extends beyond national frontiers.[46]

[46] James Tweedie, *The Age of New Waves: Art Cinema and the Staging of Globalization* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2013), 1-2.

Therefore, if it is true that neither the filmmaker nor the writer of *19/87* had made conscious references to the films of Truffaut or Godard, with Diengdoh's camera work being mostly guided by his fascination with the anarchist ideas of Bakunin, it must nevertheless be affirmed that the definition of 'Khasi New Wave' can be adopted for *19/87*. As the filmmaker himself admitted, his film is a work "that speaks another kind of truth" or, paraphrasing Tweedie's words on the global new waves, it is an "insurgency devoted to the representation of the modern and the real". Certain artistic choices operated by Wanphrang and his team can be paralleled to the ones made more than fifty years ago in Paris by the directors and auteurs involved in the Nouvelle Vague, since this movement, like its global counterparts nowadays,

> represented a break in filmmaking practice at the turn of the 1960s, introducing new ways of making films outside the mainstream industry, spreading the use of lighter technologies, ushering in an entire new generation of directors, stars, cinematographers, producers, and composers. It also significantly revolutionized the way people saw films and the way they wrote about them, in particular popularizing the *politique des auteurs*.[47]

[47] Ginette Vincendeau, "IN FOCUS: The French New Wave at Fifty Pushing the Boundaries", *Cinema Journal*, 49.4 (2010), 135.

Directors like Truffaut and Godard intervened in the intellectual debate of the moment, in an effort "to grasp and represent inevitable historical change ... while still retaining control of the production and aesthetic process".[48] This helps us to understand why *19/87* was celebrated as the beginning of a 'movement' that distinguished itself in many ways from the previously produced Khasi films, an industry relatively young (the first film was made in 1982) and yet already shadowed by the starlight of the Bollywood blockbusters.

[48] Ibid., 138.

19/87 challenges both the conventional form of the mainstream Hindi feature film, with its reliance on the song and dance sequences, and the traditional story-plot, typified by either the action movie or the melodramatic genre. Watching *19/87*, we are not swept into a magic realm, nor do we voyeuristically indulge in sensual dances or heroic actions. There are neither heroes nor villains, but common men, *real* characters who are presented through delicate touches of light, sketches of day-to-day life, realistic sequences and intimate shots which contradict the mainstream format of the Bollywood hits. As Hill posited for the French New Wave directors, the work of these Khasi artists, too, is that of "primary creators, authors, auteurs (which ideally meant writer-directors) of their films".[49] *Moreover, 19/87* presents itself as a new wave film for its "form of 'imperfect cinema' whose material poverty becomes a marker of its more direct engagement with the reality of the postcolonial condition".[50] It is the product of "a hybrid ... contaminated cultural category" (ibid.) that belongs to the realm of art cinema, displaying the historical specificities of its local place and time of birth, whilst engaging with similar cultural trends in the global mediascapes.[51]

The actors, also crew-members as is often the case in low-budget enterprises, are non-professionals, local youths engaged in a performance of collective re-enactment of their own lives and histories. The goal they strive to achieve is the debunking of stereotypes which nurture violent forms of ethno-nationalism. Acknowledging that everything is a 'misapprehension', they seem to subscribe to the idea that stories, like histories, can be told from multiple perspectives and with different innuendos, without ever betraying the quest for truth.

As Alun Munslow has pointed out, textual historical representations are also "invented, directed and produced as any film".[52] What textual and visual narratives of historical events have in common, Munslow argues, is that both "are ... metonymic narrative devices with the film director/producer making as many (and similar) narrative choices as any historian does" (ibid.). This resonates with what Robert Rosenstone has been claiming since the end of the 1980s:[53] the visual media, and the dramatic feature in particular, can provide many insights into the historical truth(s) of the past, without impinging on 'factuality' as such, since all narrations, including historical writings, are ultimately "constructions".

The filmic and literary narrations of the turmoil that hit Shillong in 1987, whilst avoiding violent scenes of the riots, take a look into the life of a Khasi and a Muslim tailor, electing them as representatives of the groups that confronted each other during those terrible days, albeit avoiding the pretence of presenting an accurate account of the facts as they *really* unfolded. The authors of *19/87* rather try to 'make sense' of a terrible (and recurring) event, searching for new meanings and innovative solutions. In so doing, *19/87* poses a challenge to the biased representations of the local histories, bringing into focus those hidden (hi)stories often erased in the program of ethno-nationalist constructions of identity and related claims of belonging.

[49] Rodney Hill, "New Wave Meets the Tradition of Quality: Jacques Demy's The Umbrellas of Cherbourg", *Cinema Journal*, 48.1, 27-50.

[50] James Tweedie, *The Age of New Waves: Art Cinema and the Staging of Globalization* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2013), 1-2.

[51] The term was coined by Arjun Appadurai, who named 'mediascapes' some "landscapes of images" that "provide (especially in their television, film and cassette forms) large and complex repertoires of images, narratives and 'ethnoscapes' to viewers throughout the world, in which the world of commodities and the world of 'news' and politics are profoundly mixed". As Appadurai further highlights, "[t]he lines between the 'realistic' and the fictional landscapes [the audiences] see are blurred..." so that, in the end, what the spectators see are nothing more than constructed "imagined' worlds". See Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy", in Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, eds., *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords,* Revised Edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 590.

[52] Alun Munslow, *Narrative and History* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 67.

[53] Robert A. Rosenstone, "History in Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film", *The American Historical Review*, 93.5 (1988), 1173-1185; *Visions of the Past. The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard U. P., 1995); "The Historical Film as Real History", in Marcia Landy, ed., *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media* (New Brunswick: Rutgers U. P., 2000), 50-66; *History on Film, Film on History*.

Whilst avoiding the pitfalls of ethnic, religious or cultural radicalization, whose manifestation is often just crude violence against non-tribals, indigenous writers, filmmakers, musicians, and artists are trying to reflect on the reasons behind this conundrum and the paths that could be taken in order to favour a climate of peaceful and constructive dialogue with all parties involved. Engaging in an analysis of grassroots realities, rather than relying on simplistic historical renderings of 'facts', one of the biggest challenges of the New Wave emerging from Northeast India is that of re-presenting the past, narrating alternative histories and *un*-making forged differences, whilst acknowledging the complexity of layered identities that are constantly caught – and transformed – in the historical flow.

Conclusion

Who is a real insider? Who is a complete stranger? What if, by an historical accident, somebody shifts from being an 'outsider/*within*' to being an 'in/outsider', an individual who has claims on the right to belong to a place even if he may be not indigenous? Can an outsider ever become an insider without turning into an enemy? Can friendship become a viable path of reconciliation where "those creatures who are indeterminate from the point of view of the dominant division"[54] can be welcomed inside the group?

[54] Bordieu, "Codification", 82.

These are just some of the questions that the story of *19/87* has raised, without the ambition of providing any definitive solution, but with the wish of presenting possible *new ways/new waves* to tackle, through cinema and literature, the issues of representational practices and identity politics in Meghalaya.

The story ends on a personal reflection by Suleiman, again sitting on the roof of his hut and looking at a sky full of stars, with no kites to fight:

> A strong, brief wind rustled the leaves of the guava tree,
> somewhere echoed the empty clank of a loose tin sheet.
> Another day, he thought, another day is what the future is built on.
> He looked up.
> The sky, emptied of kites and wires,
> had unrevealed and was full of stars.[55]

[55] Pariat, *19/87*, Kindle location 1500.

19/87, both in its literary and filmic renditions, can be taken as an exemplary case of experimentation with storytelling at the crossroads between fiction and history, a slippery terrain of investigation where imagination and reality are contested, discussed and readdressed in order to offer alternative and layered readings of the past. The story of Banri and Suleiman aimed at portraying a place of creative encounter and of production of new "epistemic modalities"[56] that can challenge the passive reception of a biased and univocal retelling of historical facts, which usually erases the dkhars' voices from the master narrative of indigenous history. Hence, the Khasi New Wave's auteurs preside over this world of

[56] According to the scholar of linguistics Jan Nuyts: "[E]pistemic modality concerns an estimation of the likelihood that (some aspect of) a certain state of affairs *is/has been/will be true (or false)* in the context of the possible world under consideration. This estimation of likelihood is situated on a scale going from certainty that the state of affairs applies, via a neutral or agnostic stance towards its occurrence, to certainty that it does not apply, with intermediary positions on the positive and the negative sides of the scale" (Jan Nuyts *Epistemic Modality, Language, and Conceptualization: A Cognitive-Pragmatic Perspective* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001), 21-22. For a critique and a reappraisal of this complex issue, see A. Papafragou "Epistemic

possibilities and multiplicities, in order to avoid generalisations, superficiality, trivialisation and the flattening of complexity. Their narratives aim at revealing concealed (hi)stories, alternative ways of imagining the past and envisioning the future across the sliding doors of the present.

Modality and Truth Conditions", *Lingua,* 116 (2006), 1688-1702. Available online at the URL: http://papafragou.psych.udel.edu/papers/Lingua-epmodality.pdf.

Tehezeeb Moitra

Terra Firma and Fluid Spaces. Warli Painting from the Neolithic to the Postmodern

Abstract: This essay examines the locus of change and, perhaps more significantly, the consequent implications and ramifications behind the recontextualization of Warli painting since the 1970s. The arguments put forth adopt an art historical perspective to analyse and address questions of how to view the status of the art object in a wider discursive context. The discourse focuses on the juxtaposition between an uninstitutionalised ancient art form as it is disseminated in an institutionalised contemporary society and the dialogue that results from this dichotomy, which attempts to navigate the shaky terrain upon which identities are formed and binaries are transcended. Issues surrounding representation have always been in contention and these are heightened in the case of Warli painting, which until the mid-20th century lacked any kind of formal structure. Acknowledging the exigent need to investigate the changing identity of the artefact within the context of the current postmodern age, which is marked by its very fragmentation and intrinsic "incredulity toward metanarratives", (Jean-François Lyotard) previously unalienable Truths such as Authenticity, Identity, Originality are thrown into question, consequently utterly destabilising the position of the art object. And a fundamental issue is raised: how does one interpret and negotiate an ancient art form within a highly commercialised global context?

Keywords: *Warli art*, *postmodern*, *identity*, *third space*, *deterritorialization*

The Players and the Playing Field: Contextualizing the Discourse

The term Warli art is eponymously linked to the Warlis, an Adivasi tribe that comes from the Thane district of India. Knowledge and practice of Warli painting was principally limited to the inhabitants of the region until the late twentieth-century after which it "took a radical turn when a man, Jivya Soma Mashe[1] started to paint, not for any special ritual, but on regular basis";[2] since that time Mashe has unanimously been credited as having been the one to have popularised and promoted Warli painting. In the early 1970s Mr. Bhaskar Kulkarni, a social worker invested in the development and protection of the Warli tribe, took a special interest in Mashe's talent[3] and his support encouraged the forty-nine year old artist to publically display his work for the first time at the Gallery Chemould, Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai in 1975. A clear articulation of this moment is fundamental as it marks not just a radical turning point in the history of Warli art as it moved from the village and into the gallery but also for the significance of Mashe's contribution, which lies in both his rendition of the art form as well as his role in the very remapping of the artefact by casting it into an entirely altered dimension of physical space and contextual relevance in the contemporary sphere.

Warli painting, no longer tied to the site of its original physical landscape, has

[1] Mashe, a member of the Warli tribe, has also received a great deal of acclaim for his work both at a national (he has won the National Award for Tribal Art 1976, *Shilp Guru* award 2002 and the highly acclaimed *Padma Shri Award* in 2011) and international level (he was honoured with The Prince Claus Award in 2009).

[2] Http://www.warli.in/2010/12/how-it-explore-to-world.html, accessed 26 October 2015.

[3] It is of relevance to mention that Mashe, who was a farmer at the time he met Kulkarni, painted solely as a form of recreation and self-expression.

(since) been imported from the local to the global arena and directly into the proverbial space of the 'white cube'. Expressing the different paradigms that underline the global and local, anthropologist Arturo Escobar says: "the global is associated with space, capital, history and agency, while the local, conversely, is linked to place, labor, and tradition – as well as with women, minorities, the poor and, one might add, local cultures".[4] Considered in such a context: what happens when a local art enters the global; especially when mediated by the western hegemonic dynamic of the international art world?

The gallery can never, even under the most banal circumstances, be a "neutral space"[5] and is, on the contrary, a highly activated site suffused with an agency that offers a platform for socio-political, cultural and intellectual exchange. The physical act of moving the art object from the local and into the global, across both space and culture, creates an almost metonymic performativity upon which the artwork is staged thereby resulting in a considerable degree of flux, mutability and recoding, causing not just a physical but a conceptual shift as well. In his seminal essay "Notes on the Gallery Space" art critic and academic Brian O'Doherty highlights the potency of the gallery, noting that the walls of the gallery serve as a "membrane through which aesthetic and commercial values osmotically exchange".[6] Once placed inside a gallery, the automatic aestheticisation of a work allows it "to be both decontextualized and commodified"[7] and there is an unavoidable institutionalization of the art object, 'normalising' it through the (newfound) accessibility and commodification that it can now draw upon. Significantly then, the gallery becomes a kind of framing device through which to view objects that might not have previously or otherwise claimed an 'art status' such as in the case of "tribal art, [where] Art historical practises have mostly relegated Warli art to craft".[8] This commercial foundation, which necessarily results as a consequent commodification of the object as art, has impacted Warli paintings greatly, as the very act of 'transporting' it from the hutments of the Thane district and into galleries spanning the globe, has resulted in not just a hefty price tag but a host of epistemological concerns as well.

In recent years, the changed location of Warli painting has also forced a change in the viewing experience whereby paintings that were once typically done in the interior space (inside) on a hut wall and "mostly" considered as craft are now hung in the exteriors (outside) in a gallery and considered as art. The changed dynamic from the private space of the hut to a public space like the walls of a gallery raise questions concerning the role of the viewer and the complexities of spectatorship, specifically asking what it is that is being viewed, and perhaps more importantly, how?

O'Doherty proposes that context, including especially history and tradition, invades both the artworks and viewing experience, highlighting that effectively, "context becomes content".[9] As a result, the status of the artefact itself then gets thrown into question and Warli painting becomes not just an art object but rather

[4] Arturo Escobar, "Culture Sits in Places: Reflections on Globalism and Subaltern Strategies of Localization", *Political Geography*, 20.2 (2001), 155-156.

[5] Daria Dorosh, "Art and Context: A Personal View", *Leonardo,* 21.4 (1988), 361.

[6] Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 79.

[7] Hal Foster, *The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art*: (Cambridge, Mass.: Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, 1985), 203.

[8] Interview with Jothi F. Xavier by Rollie Mukerjee, *New Developments in Warli Art* (TarpArt Catalogue, 2015), http://tarpart.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/catalogue-jothi_for-email.pdf, accessed 1 November 2015.

[9] O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 15.

one that is ordered within the confines of being defined as a *tribal* object. An attempt to counter preconfigured notions of tribal art calls for the recontextualization of the object as understood in the changed context of its position and "the founding act of this recoding is the repositioning of the tribal object as art".[10]

Mashe's first international contribution followed shortly after his national debut, at the *Palais de Menton* in France in 1976 that preceded his participation in the seminal and highly controversial show at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, *Les Magiciens de la terre* in 1989. The exhibition, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin, not just effectively exposed Warli painting to an international audience[11] but significantly did so within the context of the ambitious premise of counteracting "ethnocentric practices and colonial mentality within the contemporary art world".[12] Artist and curator Rasheed Araeen describes the experience as:

> A grand spectacle with a lot of fascination for the exotic.... However, exoticism is not necessarily inherent in the works themselves. It is in their *decontextualisation*, not only in the shift from one culture to another (which is inevitable), but more importantly, in the displacement from one paradigm to another; this has emptied them of their meanings, leaving only what Frederic Jameson calls a 'play of surfaces' to dazzle the (dominant) eye.[13]

What Araeen notes is fundamental as it addresses the sensitive nature of the dissemination of art-knowledge as it travels from a local to international forum. The "inevitable" "decontextualisation" however cannot be undermined as the hegemonic impulses and attitudes with regard to the exotic 'Other' are deeply intertwined in a shift in paradigm. At a very fundamental level, simply by virtue of being in a show entitled *Magiciens de la terre*, the art object participates in archetypical associations that harken dangerously close to ideas of primitivism and the indigenous native; the *bon sauvage,* labouring away in peaceful oblivion on the walls of his hut, blissfully ignorant of the guiles of the world at large all the while creating "Tribal objects ... [which] are still not entirely free of the old evolutionist association with primal or ancient artefacts".[14]

Les Magiciens de la terre was a watershed event and was seen as a counter response to the MOMA *Primitivism* exhibition in 1984. *Primitivism* was a show that was especially polemical for several reasons but particularly for its juxtaposition of 'primitive' and 'tribal' as used to define non-western art, which was consequently placed in diametric opposition to western art, which was considered to be 'advanced' and 'modern'. One is always "properly wary of the terms *primitive and tribal*"[15] the latter two being words that lie uncomfortably close to one another especially so with the pejorative undertones when considered in light of their inescapable position in postcolonial discourse where the negotiations of power are set up in a dichotomy such that the identity of Self seeks definition in its relationship to the Other.

[10] Foster, *The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art*, 202.

[11] Mashe's work has since been exhibited all over the world, including Germany (in a shared collaboration with Richard Long in *Kunst Palast*, Düsseldorf, 2003), Italy (in 2004 at *Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea,* in Milan), the United States (in 2006 at Shippensburg University) and Paris (at the gallery *Halle Saint Pierre).*

[12] Fosco Lucarelli, *Jivya Soma Mashe and the Controversial Exhibition 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' (Paris, 1989),* (December 8, 2013), http://socks-studio.com/2013/12/08/jivya-soma-mashe-and-the-controversial-exhibition-les-magiciens-de-la-terre-paris-1989/, accessed 1 November, 2015.

[13] Rasheed Araeen, "Our Bauhaus, others' mudhouse", *Third Text; Third World Perspectives on Contemporary Art and Culture*, 6 (Spring 1989), 3-14. Emphasis added.

[14] Foster, *The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art*, 202.

[15] Foster, *The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art*, 62. Emphasis as in the original.

The Warlis, due to their status as Adivasis, a term that literally means 'original inhabitants' and "is the collective name used for the many tribal peoples of India",[16] are outside the Hindu caste system and "the majority of the population regards them as *primitive* and aims at decimating them as peoples or at best integrating them with the mainstream at the lowest rung of the ladder".[17] Their peripheral status, functioning outside central confines of the normative "mainstream" (Indian society) places the Warlis at the center of the hegemonic matrix. Jothi F. Xavier, art historian and curator, is deeply invested in contemporary development and discourse in Warli art.[18] Xavier draws upon the arguments made by anthropologist Felix Padel in his book *Sacrificing People- Invasions of Tribal Landscape*, which articulates the historical nexus in which the hegemonic dynamic was established suggesting that: "British colonialists, anthropologists and the missionaries have approached Adivasis as primitive people labeling them as savages in need of mainstreaming... [and are] responsible for propagating negative stereotypes about Adivasis which has come to be deeply embedded in the psyche of modern Indian society."[19]

What is noteworthy in Padel's argument is not just his articulation of colonial domination as being a source of "propagating negative stereotypes" but perhaps more notably how these negative stereotypes are ongoing and have taken on an almost archetypical standing in the "psyche of modern Indian society". Stereotypes are "collective frames that probably come from a 'cultural matrix', receptacle for myths, stories, and impressions common to one or more groups",[20] and are oftentimes intrinsically considered as hallmarks of identity of the 'Other' cultural group. This dynamic raises valid concerns about the art object and its relationship to representation as a production of identity, "which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation".[21] If this is the case, how does one then represent (tribal) art without running the risk of what might be called stereotyping? Is it possible to take the "tribal" out of Warli painting seeing as its very tradition is grounded in its tribal identity or is the term so encoded with "negative stereotypes" that it is crucial to even make an attempt to do so?

What is Ideologically at Stake? Representation of Identity

Once Warli painting entered the art network a whole set of questions were raised, particularly those centering around the difficulty of representation within the context of space, agency and identity considered under a postmodern perspective. The primary difficulty being that Warli painting had to navigate itself within a series of dichotomies that were set up by the very nature of its position of originating in one context (ancient)[22] but emerging and developing in another (contemporary). On identity, cultural theorist Stuart Hall said: "Identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of

[16] Adivasis of India, http://www.faqs.org/minorities/South-Asia/Adivasis-of-India.html, accessed 1 November 2015.

[17] Dr. Durgesh Narpat Valvi, *A Study of the Impact of Welfare Measures on Tribal Development in Nandurbar and Dhule Districts of Maharashtra*, (Laxmi Book Publication, 2015), 9, emphasis added.

[18] "Jothi F. Xavier is founder & director of Green the Blue Trust, which is working in the field of art and environment. In 2013, he received a fellowship on Warli art from IFA, Bangalore. He has documented new developments in Warli art and recently curated exhibitions in Vadodara and Ahmedabad", http://www.arthinksouthasia.org/2015-2016-fellows, accessed 1 November 2015. Mukerjee, "New Developments in Warli Art", http://tarpart.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/catalogue-jothi_for-email.pdf, accessed 1 November 2015.

[19] Mukerjee, "New Developments in Warli Art", http://tarpart.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/catalogue-jothi_for-email.pdf, accessed 1 November 2015.

[20] Monique Jucquois-Delpierre, "Cultural Stereotypes in Film", *Crossroads in Cultural Studies*, Tampere (Finland), Conference and Congress (June 1998). Series B: 39, Department of Sociology and Social Psychology, University of Tampere.

[21] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 392.

[22] While there are precise records that attest to this as a fact, it is generally and widely accepted by varying scholarly sources, that the "Warli culture goes back to the 3rd century BCE" specifically originating "sometime in the Neolithic period between 2,500 BC and 3,000 BC".

becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we represent ourselves".[23]

Hall's theory situates identity in close dialogue with the ceaseless production of representation, both in terms of how identity is represented and how it represents itself. The simultaneous flow of the contradictory nature of identity is apparent and intrinsic to representation. Considered in the context of self-representation, AYUSH (*Adivasi Yuva Shakti*) a "group of tribal intellectuals here to create awareness about tribal empowerment and development"[24] has set up a webpage that plainly states that the "page is created and maintained by tribals, *we* are here to share *correct* information about Warli art".[25] Interestingly, the 'negative', 'primitive' and 'marginalised' stereotypes predominately associated with the word 'tribal' are juxtaposed alongside an exaltation of the tribal identity that resounds with a strong communal voice of authority and pride. Significantly, Warli painting is forced to confront the inherent inconsistency of conceiving of both "ourselves-as-others", and "others-as-ourselves" in an arena where there is a "permeability of borders".

In a panel discussion on global tendencies and exhibitions British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare, who is particularly interested in ideas of cultural identity and its relationship with globalisation, expressed his concern regarding "the proliferation of and a curatorial tendency toward a neo-nineteenth-century 'discovery' of the new and foreign artist".[26] Shonibare's particular use of the words 'discovery', 'new' and 'foreign' are salient in the case of Warli painting where what is 'new' and "foreign" is not the artist himself or even the art form – but rather the contemporary context in which the artwork produced is being viewed, understood and disseminated, which renders 'ancient' and 'unknown' 'new' and 'discovered'.

This viewing, understanding and dissemination takes place within a system where "in the shows curated on 'Tribal' (vernacular) Art in particular" Shonibare's "over travelled curator" becomes what Xavier calls the "higher authority ... whose position reshuffles between 'we' and 'I' and in the process the artist's agency is negated".[27] As a way to "undo the very stereotypes that constitutes 'Tribal Art'" Xavier repositions the place of the "higher authority" consequently retaining the focus on artist's individual identity and consequent agency. Through this focus on the individual rather than the collective, the stereotyping which often occurs as a result of the generalization made of the collective tribal are minimized.

Highlighting recent trends in the curation of "Tribal Art", Xavier notes that "there have been some scores of shows curated which attempted at removing the anonymity of the "Tribal" artists by placing them at par with the mainstream urban contemporary artists yet they are still recognized by their community identity".[28] However, while the concept of "communal identity" in this case refers to its tribal framework and hence 'negative stereotypes' associated with tribal connotations, the importance of the community cannot be undermined as it is the very act of the communal that marks traditional Warli paintings.

[23] Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" in S. Hall and P.du Gay, eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996), 3.

[24] Https://adiyuva.wordpress.com/about/, accessed 1 November 2015.

[25] Http://www.warli.in/2010/12/about-us.html, accessed 29 October 2015, emphasis added.

[26] Yinka Shonibare, *Global Tendencies: Globalism and Large-Scale Exhibition. Panel Discussion*, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_3_42/ai_110913973/pg_11/, accessed 3 December 2011.

[27] Mukerjee, "New Developments in Warli Art", http://tarpart.org/wpcontent/uploads/2015/01/catalogue-jothi_for-email.pdf, accessed 1 November 2015.

[28] Ibid.

The 'community identity' present in traditional Warli painting becomes an important framing device through which Warli art is perceived and through the changed position of the art object ideas of cultural agency also come into play. As Bhaskar has noted, individual action, cannot be considered in isolation and is always bound to society, which "is both the ever-present condition and the continually reproduced outcome of human agency".[29] The agency derived from the traditional communality of Warli art is rendered porous though a network that is a "constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments which ... both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations".[30]

Customarily, Warli painting was created 'only' by groups of married 'women' who painted on the walls of their huts, in a manner that was once considered a ritualised craft, to commemorate events such as marriage. Once placed in a gallery the communal inclusiveness morphed "into a kind of social elitism – [as] the gallery space is exclusive ... [and] art is difficult".[31] Furthermore, after that critical moment in the mid 1970's, what was once considered as community craftwork done by women came to be understood not just as art but an art whose 'reinventor' was a 'man' who helped define and create the shift from a ritual to what is now called a 'regular'[32] practice. The male hegemonic dynamic is enforced and the movement from the local space of the tribal village into the international space of the gallery gets almost seamlessly intertwined within a power structure centring around gender dynamics.

Mashe has oftentimes been praised for his 'reinvention'[33] of Warli painting, which at some level references his pioneering ability to adapt to different kinds of material including paper and then later canvas and acrylic – a far cry from the traditionally used methods.[34] However, excavating the word 'reinvention' at a more profound level brings to the front a deeper relationship between the ancient 'invented' art form and Mashe's contemporary rendition, one that betrays the series of implications that underpin the dramatically changed trajectory of Warli painting from within the parameters of the village of its origin into a global forum.

The Passage of Time: Deterritorialization and Movement

The extreme mobility of Warli art as it travels, transcending not just physical and geographical boundaries but virtual ones as well, forces a reordering of the once stable philosophies and cultural ideologies that once defined, and indeed sustained, its very ethic. The question of decentralization is perhaps that much more radical for an art whose premise is based upon its very tradition. Contemporary representations of Warli painting have inspired criticism that considers drawing "figures on trays, pen stands, plates, pots ... [to be] anthropologically and even ethically wrong".[35]

Art objects, like all things, are non-static and subject to changes in the

[29] Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences,* Second Edition (New York: Harvester Weatsheaf, 1989), 34.

[30] Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, "What Is Agency?", The *American Journal of Sociology*, 103.4 (January, 1998), 962-1023.

[31] O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, 76.

[32] Https://adiyuva.wordpress.com/about/, accessed 25 September 2015.

[33] The Prince Claus Award acknowledges Mashe "for his creative reinvention of an art vocabulary that was disappearing, for his vivid representation of the Warli vision of nature and culture in equilibrium, for highlighting the contemporary relevance of local forms of knowledge, and for his significant contribution to the culture and development of the tribal peoples". Visit http://www.princeclausfund.org/en/activities/opening-soil.html, accessed 15 August 2014.

[34] Reema Banerjee quotes Khurshed Gandhy, wife of late Kekoo Gandhy who was the owner of Gallery Chemould: "Bhaskar had discovered Madhubani paintings and he then told us that he had found these beautiful paintings of an unknown art form in the villages of Maharashtra as well. Warli paintings were done on walls by the womenfolk-on occasions like marriages and it wasn't easy to get these crafts persons to use paper as a medium instead. Bhaskar then discovered that Jivya was good at painting on varied media and trained him. We went with him and met Jivya and agreed to do a show for him at Gallery Chemould". Visit http://www.dnaindia.com/lifestyle/salon-talking-in-tribal-tones-1109736, accessed 5 August 2014.

[35] Robin Tribhuwan, *Threads Together: A Comparative Study of Tribal and Pre-historic Rock Painting* (New Delhi: Discovery Pub. House, 2003), 52.

environment of which they are a part and to consider or perhaps even expect that they stay in hermetically sealed compartments, uncontaminated, as it were, by the fluid pace of the surrounding culture is unrealistic. The art object assumes a kind of malleability and becomes almost a sort of cultural artefact, which by definition is susceptible to change and ultimately baring testament to the transformations that come with time. Being a human construction, an artefact is both physical and conceptual and adds to the knowledge of a specific culture and its cultural production. According to theorist Michael Cole: "By virtue of the changes wrought in the process of their creation and use, *artifacts are simultaneously ideal (conceptual) and material.* They are ideal in that their material form has been shaped by their participation in the interactions of which they were previously a part and which they mediate in the present".[36]

While the material aspect is more self-evident (i.e. the obvious physicality of the artwork) the non-material (the values and traditions sustained within them), termed *conceptual artifacts*, by Carl Bereiter are considered equally significant. On conceptual artifacts Bereiter observes that "[they] are human constructions like other artifacts, except they are immaterial; and instead of serving purposes such as cutting, lifting and inscribing, they serve purposes such as explaining and predicting".[37] Due to the fragmentation of the postmodern and especially due to its inherently decentralizing nature, the conceptual has a tremendous effect on the perception of the material (artefact).

Can the varied manner of representation of Warli art in contemporary society be considered a transgressive act and has this, as a consequence, compromised on the Authenticity of the art object? If one is to engage with the work in the gallery as being a simulacrum, in the Baudrillardian sense of the term, then the work assumes a certain level of hyperreality, and is no longer to be considered as simply a replica of the paintings on the huts but rather a reality, suffused with meaning in its own right. Rather than being an aggressive ethical assault that compromises on the authenticity of the art object, the plurality in representation and creation of Warli painting repositions the understanding of the art object as developing within the inevitable growth of cultural evolution. With changing conditions it is crucial to call upon a new conceptual language to redefine the aesthetic theories that confined the position of tribal art as (being) "repetitive reformulations of preordained schema, collectively arrived at and subject to limited innovation".[38]

The lack of site specificity and the shifting topographies result in an intense anthropological 'deterritorialization' and the expanding contexts subject the art object to the sensitive relationship between geography and culture. The deterritorialization of Warli art has effected not just its supply but also at a more fundamental level, its mode of creation; oil paints now substitute rice paste, and hut walls are being replaced by lampshades and dresses on fashion runways.[39] The long reaching arm of the Internet has added yet another layer to the deterritorialization of Warli art, and now finding a "how to make Warli Painting

[36] Michael Cole, *Cultural Psychology: A Once and Future Discipline* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard U. P., 1996), 117. Emphasis added.

[37] Carl Bereiter, *Education and Mind in the Knowledge Age* (Mahwah: Routledge, 13 May 2002), 58.

[38] Mukerjee, "New Developments in Warli Art", http://tarpart.org/wpcontent/uploads/2015/01/catalogue-jothi_for-email.pdf, accessed 1 November 2015.

[39] In 2006, at the Lakme india fashion week, Warli hit the runways of India and famous Indian models were seen sporting clothes with Warli motifs.

Tutorial" is freely accessible to people sitting continents away from the hutments where the Warli Tribe resides. When the artwork moves into not just another space, materially or geographically speaking, such as a gallery, but into other intangible spaces like the Internet does this lead to the dematerialization of the 'original' art object and as a consequence result in the suspension of the artwork's autonomy?

Deterritorialization is, in many respects, fundamentally a liberating phenomenon, which results in fresh interpretation, growth and meaning.[40] People are more aware of the Warli tribe; there is a dissemination of information on their art form, their traditions, their history, indeed, their very existence – not to mention the vast improvement in the economic status of the artisans and their tribe. In the case of Warli art, deterritorialization is extreme and changing territories have utterly re-articulated the relationship between tradition and place; especially if place can, as Massey asks, be considered the "prime source for the production of personal and cultural identity?"[41] How does this affect the production of individual and cultural identity?

[40] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum, 2007).

[41] Doreen Massey, "Geographies of Responsibility", *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 86.1 (2004), 5.

The importance of 'place' in tradition of Warli painting is vital primarily because of the relationship the Warlis have with their land. At a very physical level, it was on the walls of the huts made out of *karvi* sticks that the paintings were traditionally done and the materials used in creation were chiefly drawn from the earth itself: mud, cow dung, and charcoal for making what could be seen as a sort of canvas; and rice, water and gum to make the paste necessary for the dye required in painting of the white figures and designs. Vaguely spartan in nature, the almost minimalist style that uses the triangle, square and circle for definition,[42] draws upon an austere lexicon, which seems to harken the vocabulary of early cave paintings, to pass down its tradition and folklore. Thematically speaking, the paintings typically depict scenes that represent quotidian life in the village, folk tales, nature and mythology; including themes such as religion, festivals and harvest. It is significant to note that the Warli people speak the unwritten Warli language and so Warli paintings assume a kind of heightened significance as being a physical manifestation of the spoken word or unrecorded thought – the importance of the pictorial highlights their intense relationship with the natural world.

[42] "The circle and triangle come from their observations of nature, the circle representing the sun and the moon, the triangle derived from mountains and pointed trees. Only the square seems to obey a different logic and seems to be a human invention, indicating a sacred enclosure or piece of land. While men and women are depicted in almost identical fashion, the only differentiator is the little knot of hair in the form of a bun, that indicates women", http://www.warli.in/2010/12/history-of-warli-art.html, accessed 1 November 2015.

It would be fatuous to assume that Warli painting remains a discreet entity after and through a continued and ongoing process of deterritorialization and yet it would be impossible to ignore the traditions that form its very foundation. Ultimately, the paintings function out of the limits of classification, existing instead, as an entity, which is *sui generis* – not ancient and not contemporary, collapsing instead into the indistinct ground of the liminal – the Third Space, which provides a location for the unravelling of "new signs of identity" and meaning. According to Bhabha: "These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs

of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation in the act of defining the idea of society itself".[43]

Bhabha's elucidation highlights the importance of the liminal ground as being an active site for the progression of identity, which always has an impact on the larger breadth of society. And it is in the ambivalence of the Third Space that Warli art plays out positioning itself in a way that refutes binaries of being one or the other but both – an ancient art that not just functions but also flourishes in a postmodern context.

Fig. 1: Examples of traditional Warli painting. More examples are available at the following link: http://www.warli.in/.

Embracing Hybridity: Redefining Identity in the Third Space

The word 'glocal' is a useful portmanteau, which recognizes the "localization of the global and the globalization of the local".[44] The hybridity of this term allows for the coexistence of a relationship that does not consider the local and global as discreet entitles but allows instead for the possibility, based on the necessity of "dialogue, negotiation and coexistence"[45] within the cultural plurality of the postmodern world of today. The 'glocal' aspect of Warli painting acknowledges it as a dynamic art form full of evolution and growth. Refusing to embrace its evolution would relegate it to the limitations of a tightly bound "anthropological framework resulting into fossilization of tribal art"[46] – completely static and without movement and consequently without agency.

The conflict between the anthropological "fossilization", ringing with colonial hegemonic undertones, and the postmodern movement rearticulates the understanding of the Warli identity as being inevitably hybrid in nature: "This destabilization and reconfiguration of the notion of identity can lead in many directions, both conceptually and politically. It can, on the one hand, turn inwards, towards an appreciation of the internal multiplicities, the decentering of identity, perhaps the fragmentations, of identity. It is in this context that we consider place as meeting place and the inevitable hybridities of the constitution of anywhere".[47]

A changing context results in the creation of a kind of hybridity, which is understood to be "the integration (or, mingling) of cultural signs and practices".[48] Contextualized as being a "contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation"[49]

[43] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1.

[44] Escobar, "Culture Sits in Places", 156.

[45] Mario Blaser, Ravi de Costa, Deborah McGregor, eds., *Reconfiguring the Web Life: Indigenous Peoples, Relationality, and Globalization*, in *Indigenous Peoples And Autonomy. Insights for a Global Age* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 21.

[46] Mukerjee, "New Developments in Warli Art" http://tarpart.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/catalogue-jothi_for-email.pdf, accessed 1 November 2015.

[47] Massey, *Geographies of Responsibility*, 5.

[48] John Lye, "Some Issues in Postcolonial Theory", (1997/1998), available online at http://www.butler.brocku.ca/english/courses/4F70/postcol.php, accessed 5 August 2012.

[49] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 37.

hybridity provides an activated site that simultaneously destabilizes binaries while raising other conceptual models through which the inscription of identity politics is registered. Questions of hybridity are a pivotal facet in the understanding of (the identity of) Warli art where it is no longer to be considered as a binary object but one, which thrives in the middle space.

Establishing an ethic through which one viewed Warli painting was complicated from the very outset because one was dealing with a work, which had previously[50] no institutional validation or framework thereby locating it in an area of vulnerability. Since its growth beyond the village walls, Warli painting has been repositioned, literally and metaphorically, into an entirely different dialogue and realm of understanding. The necessarily hybrid status it has acquired when placed in the (inevitably) contemporary environment of today, has re-configured the art object "in accordance with the contemporary processes of internationalisation" (134) but at the same time retaining it's fundamental basis in the ancient art it started out as eons ago.

[50] As understood as before Bhaskar Kulkarni's intervention in 1975.

Giuseppe De Riso

Of Smoke and Mirrors. Adivasi Women in Postcolonial India

Abstract: This paper proposes a critical comparative analysis of two literary works dealing with the theme of violence as it is etched in various ways on the bodies of Adivasi women in the Northeastern region of India. Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" and "Behind the Bodice: *Choli ke Pichee*" (in *Breast Stories*, 1997) share as common denominator female figures striving against the rapacious legacy of patriarchal feudalism, as well as the opposing forces within the Indian state which frame each other in a game of smoke and mirrors casting confusing shadows over the cultural politics of post-colonial India towards Adivasi women. And while the bodies of tribal women are abused by those who are generally considered violators of tribal land and tradition, they undergo a similar fate even by those purportedly trying to defend or protect them. The women described in Devi's story, though, seem to provide an important counterpoint to the violence and the tropes used in the production of truth claims by dominant discourses in India. In fact, they articulate an embodied knowledge that appears to reveal the vicious deadlock produced by the erasures and concealments necessary to keep the ideal of the Indian nation legitimate and credible.

Keywords: *Adivasi, tribal women, violence, body, power, survival*

> You are [also] likely to think that this author is obsessed with issues like police-struggle-violence-adivasi-rakshamorcha and so on. That nothing else interests her. But look, there's basically just the one question. Kaise bache?
> How does one survive?
> Mahesweta Devi, "Shanichari"

Introduction

The present reflection focuses on two short stories written by Indian writer Mahasweta Devi − "Draupadi" (1978) and "Behind the Bodice: *Choli ke Pichhe*" (1996) − in order to consider the suppression of tribal women's struggles from the collective memory of post-Independence India, and the political implications of such removal. As is well-known, Indian scholar Gayatri C. Spivak notes how official Indian historical accounts have a tendency to neglect the role played by peasants in the struggle for independence in favour of the nationalist elites.[1] This produces a double erasure whereby "the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow".[2] In considering how literary depictions participate in or contrast such silencing, this essay takes its clue from Spivak's questioning oppressed subjects' ability to make their voice heard.[3] Not only do oppressed subjects often find themselves alienated and speechless, their voice is also misappropriated by those who occupy privileged positions. This results in a centripetal assemblage of power

[1] Ranajit Guha and Gayatri C. Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York and Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1988); Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World History* (New York: Columbia U. P., 2002); *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard U. P., 1997); *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham, NC: Duke U. P., 1999 [1983]); Marnie Hughes-Warrington, ed., *Palgrave Advances in World Histories* (Houndmills, N. Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). In trying to reframe Indian history as a chance for oppressed categories to improve their condition, Ranajit Guha and his collaborators have also questioned the concept of the 'political' as it has been conveyed in English derivations of Marxist historiographical approaches. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 2000).

[2] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in Rosalind C. Morris, ed., *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia U. P., 2010), 41.

[3] Ibid.

which reduces the former to nothing more than the evanescent figures or powerless puppets of whoever decided to speak on their behalf. Consequently, the main concern here is not going to be with the 'position' of the one(s) speaking about, or next to, the subaltern, but helping expose the invisible network of powers and interests whose interaction ultimately ends up endorsing any specific account of reality. Only in the folds and at the limits of representation does it become possible to question the epistemological exclusions of Adivasi women, thus reducing the eventuality of making up one more orientalised or, worse, ventriloquised narrative. If the subaltern cannot speak, what kind of agency, if any, can she attain through the twisted maze of distorting narrations made on her account?

Draupadi

The first female character discussed here is Draupadi Mejhen or, Dopdi, as she is known among her comrades. Draupadi is the eponymous character of a story first published in 1978 in a collection titled *Agnigarbha* ('womb of fire').[4] As an Adivasi woman belonging to a group of rebels active in a northern area of West Bengal, she is involved in the Naxalite insurgence against the state and the hideous exploitment of tribal people by local zamindars, or landowners.[5] When the story opens, in 1971, she is a fugitive avoiding the claws of state police, who had been chasing her and her husband (Dulna) for four years, after they had taken part in the killing of the landowners of their village, Surja Sahu and his son. When the village was hit by a drought, Surja Saru's family refused to share the water contained in their "*upper-caste* wells" (20, here and in all the following quotations from the book the emphasis is in the original), while indigent villagers were dying from thirst. Draupadi and Dulna were among the main instigators of the uprising that led villagers to occupy the wells. Yet, thirst was not the only motive for which Draupadi and Dulna harboured bitterness against the Sarus' clan. Many years before the rebellion, Dulna's grandfather had been forced to borrow some paddy from them. This *de facto* resulted in the legal enslavement of his lineage, since all of his descendants were thus forced to work for the Saru's family without any compensation.

This kind of practice was not uncommon. The promulgation of the so called Land Transfer Regulation Acts during the years 1949-1989 led to the increasing appropriation of land by the zamindars through the structural displacement of Adivasis.[6] Land alienation was created in the tribal areas especially by non-tribal landowners and a trading class supported by the subtle complicity of the state and the contradictory fallacies present in the land regulations of its legal system.[7] Such exploitative structure goes back in a different form to even before the moment India gained independence from England. When on 12 August 1765 the Mughal Shah Alam's issued the 'farman', the document by which the East India Company

[4] Translated in English by Gayatri Spivak three years later. The two stories discussed and quoted in this article are contained in Mahasweta Devi, *Breast Stories* (Seagull Books: Calcutta, 1997).

[5] Radha Kumar, "Contemporary Indian Feminism", *Feminist Review,* 33 (Autumn 1989). Mahasweta Devi, *Breast Stories,* trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Calcutta, London, New York: Seagull Books, 2014).

[6] Bandlamudi Nageswara Rao, *Mapping the Tribal Economy: A Case Study from a South Indian State* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013).

[7] These were used to gain control over the Adivasi territories through mortgages, forceful dispossession of land, occupations and illegal encroachments which alienated Adivasis from their homes while putting the tribal method of life in danger.

[8] M. Reza Pirbhai, *Reconsidering Islam in a South Asian Context* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009).

gained the revenue administration of the states of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the British Collectors of revenue introduced in India the rules of English Law.[8] The inevitable intertwining of British interests with those of the landowners represented a watershed moment in the history of the country. In the name of the 'Western' principle of justice, zamindars were encouraged to use any means they deemed necessary to gain and exploit soil, almost always at the expense of Adivasis. The latter were cheated out of their lands and lured in the net of indebtedness through a bondage system which turned them and their children into slaves for generations, as they tried to repay by manual labour the small loans which they had borrowed from landowners at exorbitant interests.[9] For all practical purposes, independence worked in transformative continuity, rather than opposition, with the values of colonialism.

In the novel, Dulna's family had fallen into the pit of despair produced by this colonial heritage, after being tricked by their landowner's into the bondage system for three generations. The exploitment would have continued indefinitely had he not risen up against his oppressors. The aftermath of uprisings at Naxalbari made justifiable even the most brutal of responses by the Indian army. After the rebellion led by Draupadi and Dulna, one of the measures used to stifle opposition and punish the insurgents was a so called 'Operation Bakuli', a fictitious event recalling real ones, when "three villages were cordoned off and machine gunned" (20). Draupadi and her husband lay on the ground and, faking dead, managed to survive. Draupadi and Dulna, two migrant labourers belonging to the Santhal tribe, have been on the run since, living as fugitives and using forests as their main shelter. Police forces have been hunting them like beasts, using even the most despicable measure to achieve their goals. Such chases usually reach their painful climax in what are generally known as 'encounters', where insurgents were generally brutally gunned down. These demises are then officially classified as 'accidents', deaths which inadvertently happen while the prisoner is being held captive. Dulna has already been killed when the story begins. In a fragment of their past together, shared by Draupadi in a moment of recollection, she remembers when the military left Dulna's corpse as a bait on a stone, waiting for Draupadi to take away the body. Senanayak, the man in charge of their search, acknowledges that "this is the hunter's way, not the soldier's". Yet, he also "knows that these brutes cannot be dispatched by the approved method" (24).

This kind of stigmatization of rebels reflects Senanayak's presumption of knowing "the activities and capacities of the opposition better than they themselves do" (21). His conceit of the rebels is a key critical point which might be best understood within the bigger theoretical frame pertaining to the development of the idea of nation in India. Partha Chatterjee has discussed the diminution of the imagination implied in the idea of nation,[10] which works as a monolithic cultural formation that does not tolerate the presence of coexisting independent communities within its geographical boundaries.[11] If the idea of the nation can best

[9] Nalin Mehta and Mona G. Mehta, eds., *Gujarat Beyond Gandhi: Identity, Society and Conflict* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011).

[10] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton U. P., 1993).

[11] This represented an especially dire predicament in the extremely varied context of the Indian sub-continent and the abundance of different communities, cultures and religions often in opposition to one another and with aspirations of political autonomy (Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*).

sustain itself by actually containing or eradicating difference, Dipesh Chakrabarty maintains that India's ethnic variety produced the conditions for the kind of psychic double-bind theorized by Lacan.[12] That is, the nation as an idea of unity and stability was founded on the presence of an 'otherness' on whose constant menace the new nation could project its fears. If the Indian subject had been constituted as fundamentally unworthy or lagging behind by the epistemic gaze of the English colonisers, after Independence such feelings were internally projected onto Adivasi people as well.

This coupled with the appropriation of a Eurocentric discursive formation, introduced by the British, characterised by a progressivist vision of time: the nation is considered an enumerable community in a time seen as linear and 'homogeneous'. The introduction of homogeneous time in a place perceived as separated by a great physical distance often results in allochrony, the process by which spatial distance finds an equivalent in time. In the case of India, this engendered a chronopolitical construction in which the inhabitants of villages close to the northern borders of the country, those living closer to nature and not abiding by the rules of capital, occupied an 'out there' which came to be the same as the equivalent of a bygone era. The dominant cultural imaginary burdened Adivasis with denigrating qualities which cast them to the extreme end of the chronological scale of the 'modernity' which the achievement of a national status had brought with it.[13] The northeastern regions of India were transformed into a hyperreal[14] geopolitical entity perpetually locked in the past, an indeterminate front of projection for the 'new' uneasy national imaginary.

If the British Government of India had officially described several tribal communities as an indistinct rabble of "criminals", Indian nationalism did the same to cover the fact that their politics, too, constrained tribal people to criminal activities. A complex vision intertwining capital, time and space contributed to a kind of 'inner' colonialism directed to Adivasi communities in northern India whose effects, like in colonial times, allowed law enforcers and zamindars to enjoy the benefits of their rapacious behaviour under the protection of police forces, while the poor were treated like hardened criminals, tortured to death or thrown in jail and left to die.[15]

The special importance of the tribal women present in the stories discussed here seems to arise in Devi's profound comprehension of the 'ecological' dimension of a postcolonial imagination which intertwines nature and history to create bewildering epistemologies of space and time. Place possesses many different layers which imbricate and interact with time: its material constitution has environmental 'dispositions' (such as inhospitality) as well as phenomenological connections with the bodies moving in it and which affect them. Devi exploits such dimensions to describe places functioning as cultural and environmental dispositifs sustaining a historical mode of subordination which, affecting bodies and perceptions, is founded on fear and violence. Indeed, Draupadi's story

[12] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?", *Representations,* 37 (Winter 1992).

[13] Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*.

[14] The term hyperreal is used here after Jean Baudrillard to refer to a space both familiar and unknown, intimate and strange, separated by the distance which allows it to emerge as an object of "radical exoticism". See Jean Baudrillard, "Hyperreal America", *Economy and Society*, 22.2 (May 1993).

[15] As a side effect, this also brough with it the removal of a key piece of India's own past and history through which independent Indian consciousness could develop and sustain sentiments of nationhood, whose "distortions in the ideals of a national culture when imported into a colonial theatre would go unnoticed" (Spivak in Devi, *Breast Stories,* 80).

presents bodies which develop an uneasy relationship with the landscape and their surroundings.[16]

Draupadi is considered by the police a dangerous enemy due to her topographic familiarity with Jharkani, especially with the forest with the same name. When she is outside the forest, Dopdi is reduced to silence, she cannot even answer back when she hears her own name being called. When she hears her name shouted just before the ambush in which she is eventually caught "she thinks of nothing but entering the forest" (31). The forest offers her shelter, freedom of movement and the possibility to coordinate activities with her comrades. It is a place both of transition, and protection allowing her body to become invisible and arrest and confuse her pursuers. Visibility is a trap for a woman like her,[17] who in the forest can bury "underground for a long time in a *Neanderthal* darkness" (20). Being represented as the reign of chaos and darkness, the northeastern forests provided the perfect context for Indian government's propaganda to nurture an imaginary pervaded with fear, a place where imperscrutable forces could bring death to normal people or the military, and thrive to overthrow national unity. It required the institution of a state of exception with the introduction of heavy military presence, while the populations inhabiting those regions 'deserved' the curtailment of basic civil liberties and human rights. Arjan Singh, Senanayak's right-hand man credited as the "architect" (20) of Operation Bakuli, "fell for a bit into a zombie-like state and finally acquired [an] irrational dread of black-skinned people" (21), and is said to have anxiety after Dulna and Draupadi survived.[18]

In the story, the Special Forces attempt "to pierce that dark" by killing Santhals and making such murders pass for "accidents". Where authority, and the nation with it, can't see, any measure becomes acceptable. To dispel the darkness, sovereign power bestows upon itself total control over biological life, causing human life to become expendable. Devi makes a caustic reference to the Indian Constitution, under whose tutelage "all human beings, regardless of caste and creed, are sacred" (20). Yet, when the fugitives ability in "self-concealment" exceeds the power of the state, "accidents" 'can' and do happen. Murders can be blatantly made to pass for accidents to a public opinion willing to pay a blind eye to a semantic shift which makes a world of smoke and mirrors possible. Rebels can only be eradicated with the self-blinding complicity of normal citizens, whose indifference is the reflective surface necessary for the state to sustain the illusion. Devi does not lose the occasion to mock the hypocrisy of a system which declares equality and freedom, but where dissenting voices "are shot at the taxpayer's expense" (25).[19] The menace represented by Adivasis is 'countered' with fear inducing measures, such as killings which must be exemplary in their brutality.[20] Devi's narrative proves masterful in the literary use of the ambivalent condition of the forest as a sort of primal site of conflict both physical and, more importantly, cultural. Both reassuring shelter and hellish maze, the forest becomes a virtuality

[16] Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, eds., *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (Oxford: Oxford U. P.), 2011.

[17] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975], trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

[18] This appears to be coherent with Freud's revision of his theory of anxiety after 1926, in which it is described as a traumatic condition of helplessness in the face of anticipated danger.

[19] To quote the author, "in this India of ours, [where] even a worm is under a certain police station" one can hear "hair-raising details" (20) by the witnesses' records on those who are suspected of rebellious activities against authorities or the inhuman behaviour of landlords and moneylenders.

[20] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish.*

open to the occurrence of any event, and where any atrocity, as Senanayak admits, becomes legitimate.[21]

[21] Baudrillard, *Hyperreal America*, 245.

What also made Draupadi particularly dangerous and fearful was her proficiency in guerrilla warfare and the use of primitive weapons such as hatchet and scythe. Skillful at fighting at close quarters, her "fighting power is greater than the gentlemen's" (22), who "think the power will come out on its own if the gun is held" (22). Of course, there is a dense field of sexual connotations here which directly link to Arjan Singh's anxiety. Draupadi handles weapons that cut and thus can evirate or emasculate the male body, threatening its virility. It is also in a patriarchal sense that her power is greater than the 'gun'.

The sexual background is especially meaningful in the case of a woman fighter like Draupadi. For her, expendability is just one aspect of her punishment. Senanayak haunts her in order not just to kill her, but to 'make' her, which translates in the act of gang-raping. Rebel Adivasi women bear this constant sexual menace inscribed on their bodies. They know that they will pay not only with their lives, but with their sex as well. Writing about military area in Africa, Achille Mbembe maintained that phallic economies establish an interchangeable relationship between the gun and the phallus which 'strips' women of autonomous significance. In the words of Mbembe, possessing a gun, "is to enjoy a position of almost unrestricted access to sexual goods" which debases female corporeality to Agamben's bare life, and into which "one bores into, digs into, excavates and empties in the very act of rape".[22] In the second part of the story Draupadi's comrades betray her into the hands of the army. After her capture,[23] Draupadi is interrogated for an hour and then repeatedly raped by military guards. Through her "lightless eye" (35), Draupadi assists with almost superhuman detachment to the violence and to the consequent degradation of her body.

[22] Achille Mbembe, "Sovereignty as a Form of Expenditure", in Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, eds., *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants and States in the Postcolonial World* (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 2005), 163, 165.

[23] Or 'apprehension', to use the term employed by the military.

Draupadi was ready for such a treatment. In her years of hiding in the forest she had been mentally and physically training for this moment to come. Since she raised her voice against her oppressors, her entire life had become a ruinous cliff towards her ultimate defeat. She looks at her body with a vacant expression, as if she were unaffected. After she faked death with Dulna on the ground of her village, during Operation Bakuli, Devi compares their new existence to that of "escaped corpses" (21). This is because the condition of Draupadi has long been one of survival in the sense that Derrida gives to the word *sur-vie* (over-life), in opposition to *survivre*. While 'survivre' means to outlive or continue living, 'survie' is a kind of return from the dead, it "affirms a sort of triumph of life at the edge of death", it represents the impossible condition of living on after dying. *Survi*e, Derrida notes, does not mean resurrecting or acceding to the after life, but refers to "a commitment of life to life and unto death, whether it will be life or death".[24] It is a paradoxical double affirmation of both life and death inhering the impossible that might occur.

[24] Jacques Derrida, *H.C. for Life, That is to Say...* [2000], trans. by Laurent Milesi (Stanford: Stanford U. P., 2006).

The violence on her body brings her to a state close to the one of a

decomposing corpse. She is now an abject-object ejected, in Julia Kristeva's words, "beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable".[25] Surviving her repeated raping and mangling in her prison, which can be metaphorically compared to a tomb, she occupies an uninhabitable space of mortality. As Derrida remarks in the case of Antigone, whose "very death does not affect her", neither singularly nor sexually, insofar as women are "always in a situation of survival",[26] Draupadi's living death lasts to the point of making the impossible happen. Her imprisonment represents an excessive event of otherness which constitutes the critical wound that Draupadi survives to inflict on the guardians of nationalism themselves.

[25] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by L. S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia U. P., 1982), 1.

[26] Jacques Derrida quoted in William Robert, *Trials of Antigone and Jesus* (New York: Fordham U. P., 2010), 49.

When the following morning Senanayak eventually comes to see her, his authoritative question breaks before it can be uttered: "What is this? He is about to bark" (36), but stops. He is paralysed at the sight of the naked body of Draupadi, who "stands before him, naked. Thigh and pubic hair matted with dry blood. Two breasts, two wounds" (36). After the violence she had endured, Draupadi confronts Senanayak with the bloody spectacle of her tortured and ravaged body. She then comes closer to him and with an air of defiance anticipates his question:

> The object of your search, Dopdi Mejhen. You asked them to make me up, don't you want to see how they made me?
>
> Where are her clothes?
>
> Won't put them on, Sir. Tearing them. (36)

Draupadi, the abject 'object' of the obsessive search of Senanayak, whose existence had been source of apprehension and anxiety for his proxies, can finally pronounce her name. Devi takes care to make Draupadi speak not because she is asked to, but to set a confrontational mood with the authority Senanayak represents. She can do so because she neither has fear in his presence, nor does she feel ashamed by her nudity. In fact, to be seen by him in her naked, wrecked body is precisely what she wants. Draupadi, like Antigone, lives after death as a living corpse, which recalls her relation to the unthought, or the unthinkable. Her story is the story of a double survival: before her capture she survives in darkness; later she survives in death to emerge from her confinement (the prison/tomb) as the bare life she has been reduced to. The abject-object engenders fear in the sovereign entities when it demands to enter the space of the thinkable in the 'impossible' and dehumanized form that it has been reduced to. The object exposes its abjectness before the sovereign power and, in doing so, the brutal exigencies of an economy where she is reduced to nothing but a devalued scapegoat. In fact, the clothes which should have covered Draupadi's body from his sight appear to be Senanayak's first preoccupation. Speaking with bleeding lips, she laughs and then continues:

> What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?
> ... There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can you do? ...
> Draupadi pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts, and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed *target*, terribly afraid. (36-37)

The mythological intertext, which up to this point in the story had only been alluded to (the unsuccessful attempt at Draupadi's denudation in the ancient Indian epic the Mahabharata), becomes here an uncanny re-enactment.[27] If in the original story in the Mahabharata the female body is "used to demonstrate male glory",[28] in Devi's story, naked and stripped of its clothes, it is used to revile masculinity. If the body of the mythical Draupadi cannot be made the object of a search, and the divine intervention hides what would wound her husbands' visual economy, Devi's Draupadi undoes the myth, and with her mangled body makes visible what an economy based on self-blinding damnation refuses to see, the violence it perpetrates. By exposing the hidden agenda of the myth, *Draupadi* creatively foregrounds how the Indian nation-state replicates the colonial agenda of 'othering'. The state bureaucracy, personified by Senanayak, engages into practices of exoticization of the tribals and eroticization of women.[29] By surviving as a living corpse, Draupadi avoids the process of sexualization and disrupts the visual economy of male desire which ultimately tends to hide its object, rather than to deceptively pretend to search for it. She refuses such an envelopment to symbolically reverse the mythical act of stripping the female body naked, thus leaving Senanayak and his masculine sense of being utterly exposed.

Draupadi emerges from the darkness to upset the visual economy of male desire and make questions which produce an interruption in the idea of the Indian nation. Devi strategically draws on the religious and historical backgrounds of the Indian nation to make of Draupadi "the creative performance of a given script".[30] She deconstructively appropriates elements of the dominant imaginary framework to use as tools to question those subtle political processes of the postcolonial nation-state that first create and then alienate the subaltern from the mainstream nation. Draupadi had been the object of male desire, of the male gaze, but only on condition that she stayed unrecoverable. When her body is actually found, the male gaze needs to reduce it through extreme sexualization from divinity to whore, and finally cover it, so that the gaze can shield itself from a body which would ultimately wound its sight. As both Indian and Adivasi, Draupadi embodies the contradictions of a gendered discourse which had been invoked to represent the Indian nation to its people. By placing Draupadi in direct relation to the myth of Mother India, which was used to nourish the non-violent rebellion against the British Empire, Draupadi highlights the failure of its metaphors based on "Love and kinship",[31] and the hypocrisy behind the invoking of Hindu mythological female characters as defining Indian nationhood.[32] Draupadi embodies what the

[27] In fact, the condition of survival which Draupadi goes through is made especially powerful by this religious subtext. In the *Mahabharat*, the sacred Indian epic about two rivalling families, Draupadi is also the name of the wife shared by the five Pandava brothers, who is gambled and lost by her husbands in a game of dice with the Kauravs family. When Draupadi makes her appearence at the court in front of the men, they try to remove her Sari from her. She is married to more than one man (a condition against the scriptures) and is considered a prostitute, a label which allows her husbands' enemies to try to shamefully strip her of her clothes, a practice known as Cheer-Haran (Dunja M. Moh, *Embracing the Other: Addressing Xenophobia in the New Literatures in English* [Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2008], xiv). Yet, her sari seems to be endless. The more the rival king pulled at it, the more there seemed to be of it. In fact, Draupadi had silently prayed for the help of the god Krishna, whose providential action avoided Draupadi's fall from honour into disgrace. (Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, eds., *When the Goddess Was a Woman: Mahabharata Ethnographies. Essays by Alf Hiltebeitel* [Leiden: Brill, 2011], 196). Another interpretation proposed by Ranjana Khanna also suggests that Draupadi may have actually appealed to the other name with which she was known, 'Krishnaa' or 'dark'. From this perspective, she may have wished to be covered by darkness, become dark. As Adluri and Bagchee observe, the original epic presents Draupadī dark, as both the incarnation of the goddess Earth, and an embodiment of the goddess of Prosperity, Śrī,. As a matter of fact, Draupadī is worshipped as the personification of the Great Goddess within some regions of Tamilnadu in south India." (Adluri and Bagchee, *When the Goddess was a Woman*, 195).

[28] Gayatri C. Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 1983), 183.

[29] See, among others, Adluri and Bagchee, *When the Goddess Was a Woman.*

[30] Gayatri C. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1999), 78.

[31] The rhetorical backbone of the 'newfound' Indian nationalism described love and kinship as the two main qualities belonging to the genetic heritage of any 'proper' Indian citizen (See Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 239).

nation tries to bury and to forget. She exposes and attacks the idea of nation which used women first as a potent symbol of unity, then as warriors against the oppressors, and finally abuses and silences them to hide its true face of masculinity and violence. She serves as the emergence of India's collective unconscious, an unconscious that, to quote William Roberts' rewording of Derrida, mutatis mutandis, "has not been destroyed, only 'wounded', injured and that can live on: 'the deceased continues to act; the deceased is wounded' but returns, in a 'return of the dead' through which 'the vengeance of the repressed comes to its prominence in a wild nature that resists nationalistic taming"'.[33]

The power of Draupadi's question lies in the fact that Senanayak, and the complex system of embedded meanings he represents, cannot give an answer to it, and is thus left hanging over India's sense of itself and its identity. Draupadi, as the abject-object produced by this economy, is a terrifying form of bare life demanding that the horror perpetuated upon her be seen. By remaining "publically naked at her own insistence",[34] Senanayak is unsexed, and thus all the ideals of the nation he believes in and represents. In an uncanny echo of Lady Macbeth's mockery of her husband,[35] Draupadi's gendered mockery functions as a powerful foregrounding of female storytelling and female authority which, by encapsulating all Senanayak's fears, suggest a disquieting alternative to the role an imperialist legacy staged up for him. From this perspective, Draupadi's mockery represents an efficacious strategy of attack of Senanayak's identity.[36] The shock of being confronted by the abject-object produces the interruption of the brutal regime of Draupadi's violation and the possibility for her to make questions which, by hovering unsolved, reveal contradictions which may force the powerful agents of authority to question their own sense of self and acknowledge the order of make-believe they represent. This moment of crisis constitutes an invaluable opportunity for self-reflection and change.

[32] As Stephen Morton notes, following Indian scholar Ketu H. Katrak, Gandhi extended the metaphor of Mother India in nationalist discourse to mobilise the active support of women in public demonstrations of passive resistance against the British. Katrak further emphasises how Gandhi's political mobilisation of women through a gendered discourse of nationalism during the anti-colonial resistance movement did not lead to women's political emancipation. Rather, the political involvement of women was subordinated to the more immediate goal of national independence. The same ideal, once achieved, invested Adivasi women in a process of forgetting and silencing which represented an essential element to the sustenance of the the idea of the nation. Stephen Morton, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

[33] William Robert, *Trials of Antigone*, 48.

[34] Gayatri C. Spivak, *In Other Worlds*, 184.

[35] "Are you a man?" is the same question that Lady Macbeth addresses to her husband at his strange behaviour at the sight of Banquo's ghost: "LADY MACBETH Are you a man? / MACBETH Yes, and a brave one, who dares to look at something that would frighten the devil". (Act III, Scene 4)

[36] Marjorie Garber, *Profiling Shakespeare* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008).

Gangor

The problem of what is 'hidden' emerges even more prominently in the other Devi's story discussed here, "Behind the Bodice: *Choli ke Pichhe*". Devi starts by ironically highlighting the fact that a song of the Hindi film *Khal Nayak*,[37] titled *Choli ke Pichhe*,[38] had become, for a period, so popular as to become a sort of catchphrase or, in the words of the author, a: "*national issue*" (134-135, here and in all the following quotations from the story the emphasis is in the original). Devi piercingly considers the fact that the public opinion is "by natural law" distracted from the serious and urgent problems of the nation (such as rape, murder, injustice, and natural calamities) by secondary matters like the song of a movie, whose refrain, repeatedly and collectively sung, ironically represents the question that the people should actually be asking and be concerned about: to see beyond appearances to get to the heart of their most important matters. It's as if the people

[37] 'Villain', directed by Subhash Ghai in 1993.

[38] Which means 'behind the bodice'. It was written by the Indian composer duo Laxmikant-Pyarelal.

were constantly claiming for the truth precisely through the same instruments which hide it, thus being unwillingly complicit with the concealment of what should be eminently visible.[39] Devi derisively maintains that in such reversed order "issues will and do trample upon non-issues in the life of the nation, that is the rule" (135), alluding to the fact that the nation requires that kind of distractions for its sustenance, the inversion by which non-issues become more prominent than real problems is necessary if the idea of nation is to endure. "This is why" she concludes "'what is there' becomes so important" (ivi). Also, once again Devi deftly traces a connection between Indian cultural elements and politics, placing the female body as the unknown variable in the equation between Indian politics, religious beliefs and sexual norms since, literally speaking, the answer to the question of what lies behind the bodice is, of course, breasts.

[39] The author stresses the fact that *What is there* had become "the national problem of that year" (134) to "national *media*, the *censor-board*, liberated anti-bra girls" (135) as well as politicians and religious groups; that people "laugh, weep, dance and sing by remote control" (136), with songs like *Choli ke Pichhe* functioning as "an elixir for the times" (137): they serve to keep "the *nation* busy" (ivi) while ignoring real issues.

Upin Puri, an itinerant ace-photographer, is actually interested in 'what is there', in what lies behind the bodice. One day, walking through the streets of Jharoa,[40] Upin and his friend Ujan come across a woman breastfeeding her baby. The sight of Gangor, that is the name of the woman, moves Upin, who feels compelled to take a photograph of her breasts while the baby is suckling. Gangor does not object to her being photographed, but she asks for some money in return. Ujan was shocked and thought her to be shameless, whereas Upin gladly gave her all the money he had in his pocket: "I will sell these pictures... why shouldn't she take money? They are not dumb beasts Ujan, they understand, that even when the gentlemen distribute relief, they have some hidden agenda" (142). Even if she could imagine or perceive Upin's good intentions, she knows that he plans to get something in return for her pictures, and as un underpaid migrant worker she exploits any opportunities to collect money.

[40] A possibly fictious name probably inspired by the city of Jharia (in Jharkaland State). The town said to be situated close to Seopura, a village in the Bharatpur District (Eastern Rajastan) on the Agra-Jaipur railroad.

After that, in total admiration Upin exclaims: "God, those breasts are *stauesque*! Did you see the *mammal projections*?' But Ujan "didn't look" (142, emphasis in the original). He is embarassed by Gangor's body, so he turns his look away from it. It is critical to highlight the difference in the gaze between the two men. Ujan acts like the average person who, with his not having the courage to look at Gangor's sexualised body, sustains the regime of indifference and not-seeing criticised by Devi, and which would eventually lead to Upin's death. Contrary to Ujan, from the moment Upin takes Gangor's photograph he develops a deadly fascination for Gangor. He fantasises about her breasts caught in various situations and starts looking for her to take other pictures.

On the second occasion, though, Upin who had no money offered her his watch instead. This provokes a violent reaction on the part of Gangor, who throws the watch away and breaks it so that is stops. "The watch is stopped, will remain so. Upin did not get the watch repaired" (143). The halting of time, together with the communication breakdown between Gangor and Upin, aptly describes the relationship between native and outsider on multiple levels. In totally good faith, the 'gentleman' Upin gives Gangor his watch thinking that no harm could come

from this act. He does not even remotely imagine the kind of difficulties and social dangers a woman like Gangor has to suffer or look out for. She suspects that Upin cedes his watch only to report her to the police as a thief at a later time. This misunderstanding highlights how Gangor and Upin represent different social actors with diverse and often conflicting social contexts. Gangor's rage at Upin dramatically exposes the unwillingeness, or even impossibility, to be contained within Upin's parameters, even in light of benevolent intentions on the part of privileged exponents of the elite wishing to aid a native. Moreover, the breaking of the watch metaphorically produces the end of linear chronology which challenges Upin's 'objective' recording of her situation. Gangor here emerges as a singularity, a lived experience situated in a non-chronological temporal dimension which defies the linear, supposedly impartial chronological time which Indian elites embraced with the Eurocentric idea of modernity, and with which they pretend to enter into a dialogic relationship with the oppressed. Gangor represents what "lives 'under' the nation, resisting inclusion into the "larger" national identity, insisting on space/time trajectories that do not mesh with progressivist dominant narratives of nation and history".[41]

Upin's curiosity is compared by Ujan to an uncle of a friend of his, an anthropologist who had been to Dandakaranya to "uncover chests of aboriginal women" but ended up losing "his mind little by little". If Devi openly criticizes Ujan's indifference, she knows better than to present Upin's intensions in a totally positive light. There are problems with his basically benevolent impulse, too. The ravenous hunger for the missing body of woman is caught in its dualistic position as both well-meaning and problematic. He fantasizes "Gangor at night, roasting doughballs on a dried cowdung fire, bent slightly forward" (145), or compares her breasts to the Konarak, a temple sculpture in Orissa, as well as the cave paintings of Ajanta.[42] In other words, Gangor's body captures Upin's imagination in such a way as to become a product of his fantasy. Upin's is the outsider's gaze turning Gangor into his Other.

In the meantime, Upin's photos have reached the news with these words written in English: "The half-naked ample-breasted female figures of Orissa are about to be raped. *Save them*! *Save the breast*!" (139). This gave the town of Jharoa unwanted notoriety that puts Gangor in danger. She is recognised as the woman on the newspaper, attracting national attention on the problems of the place, and harassed. Upin starts a desperate search for Gangor, who is now difficult to find because no one would share her whereabouts with him. He feels as if he is the target of what he himself defines "a conspiracy of silence" (145). For this behaviour, Ujan thinks he's gone crazy. As a matter of fact, the place starts to exert sinister influences on Upin's mind and to be perceived as unreal by him. In Jharoa even in the midday Upin feels as a permanent night had fallen on it (148) due to the people's secrecy. Upin's questions on where he can find Gangor are met with a

[41] Nivedita Menon, "Thinking through the Postnation", in Elleke Boehmer and Rosinka Chaudhuri, eds., *The Indian Postcolonial: A Critical Reade*r (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 328.

[42] As Spivak points out in a note to the text, these "sculptural examples are international and national tourist spots" (143).

wall of silence articulating an apparently insoluble labyrinthine path which forces him to wander from village to village.

Eventually, under the notes of *Choli ke Pichhe* echoing from somewhere, Upin learns from a caretaker that he had "ruined her [Gangor] with pictures" (149). Apparently, Gangor had become more confident after Upin had taken pictures of her, she had started boasting with the people at the market and even dared to press charges against the police who, after that bravery, had been monitoring her so closely that no one dared to give work to Gangor or even speak a word to her. "Women have to be careful in Shiva's world. You're punished if you don't understand this" (150). "Now" the caretaker concludes, "she does what is expected". Upin begins to realize that his messing around with the equilibrium of the place had put Gangor in some kind of danger, yet insists on the necessity of saving Gangor without realizing the warning contained in the caretaker's statements: "Upin's head wasn't working, he couldn't grasp what the Caretaker was saying" (151). In his attempt to find Gangor and save her, Upin becomes like possessed by an obsessive fixation which drives him to live in complete solitude, he doesn't eat and starts letting himself go.[43]

When the two eventually meet, *Choli ke Pichhe* again playing in the background, Gangor admits that the moment she had gone to the police was the one in which "all was lost" (154). As in the moment of confrontation between Draupadi and Senanayak, we become upset witnesses of a reversal of subject positions which confounds and silences male authority, in this case the benevolent outsider willing to help Gangor by giving her, and indirectly to women like her, visibility in the press. In fact, Upin, whom by this time is starting to dreadfully realize the consequences of his fascination for Gangor, cannot answer her questions except impotently cry out Gangor's name:

> Gangor!
>
> You snapped many many times my chest, Sir. But I knew your plan. Otherwise would you have given so much cash?
>
> Gangor!
>
> Will Gangor unwind her cloth, or just lift it? Do your stuff, 20 rupees. Spend the night, 50, tell me quick.
>
> You are doing whore work, Gangor?
>
> What's it to you son of a whore?
>
> ...
>
> You are a bastard too Sir" (154)

Gangor continues by equating Upin's photo-taking to an act of whoring of Gangor's body, until she throws her choli at Upin so that he can finally see what's behind it. Reminding him of the song playing as they speak, she challenges him to "look what's there" (154). Upin is now confronted with the sight of the mangled breasts of Gangor; where two prominent breasts stood before, there are now only

[43] "Somewhere a feeling of vulnerability, for some time an *obsession* has been spinning him like a top. To live in such solitude, to have denied the natural demands of life so much, was perhaps not right. Gangor's developed breasts are natural, not manufactured. Why did he first they were the object of photography? Why did it seem that that chest was endangered?-What is this craziness, Sir, go away, dont' you have a home?" (152). The contrast here is apparent: Upin's quest sprung by his appreciation of the 'natural-ness' of Gangor's breasts, which he had somehow perceived to be in danger, yet his porsuit leads him to unnatural behaviour.

"volcanic craters", "two dry scars, wrinkled skin" (155) as a result of multiple acts of gang-raping. Upin can barely stand in front of Gangor's ravaged body and, eventually, runs away terrified. "There is no non-issue behind the bodice, there is a rape of the people behind it, Upin would have known if he had wanted to, could have known." (155)

By exposing Gangor's body through the press, she ended up being gang-raped by some men who had noticed her. When she had gone to the police, she was gang-raped by them, too, and after pressing charges against them, she was repeatedly tortured and gang-raped until she was mutilated and deprived of her breasts.[44] Upin, the outsider, had not considered the twisting spell of the place. Upin's delusion consists of the fact that he single-handedly believes he can save Gangor through his own means, without taking into consideration the power of the place, the actual necessities and dangers Gangor would undergo in consequence of his actions, ignoring the power of the collective gaze able to set up a distorting field ensnaring and paralyzing those who dared to look at it. At the end of this trajectory Upin finds himself as the true marginal, incapable of answering Gangor's accusations, and is eventually killed by unknown agents during his flight. This process makes him "a missing person" (137), "a nameless person's corpse" (137), whose death "escaped the nation's eye" when it was reported in the "inch-and-a-half of space in the newspaper" (137). In fact, the nation, as Devi bitterly explains at the beginning of the story, was busy singing *Choli ke Pichhe*.

[44] Taslima Nasrin and Monica Ali, "Hearing 'Subaltern' Voices of Resistance in the Works of Mahasweta Devi", Ph. D. thesis available at: https://goo.gl/eZjO0m.

Like Draupadi, who could not be covered in the metaphorical Sari of the myth of Mother India, another Adivasi woman is presented here as a gendered subject who finds no shelter or protection under the gaze of the benevolent outsider. On the contrary, her body bears the signs of an unseen and unacknowledged collective rape working as a metaphor for "a disembodied yet anthropomorphic"[45] power produced by a postcolonial imagination and whose resonances vibrate in Gangor's own name.[46] Dishearteningly hopeless as Devi's narrations may seem in their harsh realism, Senanayak's presumptions and attitude toward Draupadi, as well as Upin's almost stubborn misunderstanding of Gangor provide the possibility for a moment of revelation or crisis out of the epistemological inscrutability which abused women like Draupadi and Gangor find themselves in.

[45] Gayatri C. Spivak, *In Other Worlds*, 260.

[46] When Ujan tries to explain to Upin's wife, Shital Mallaya, the circumstances surrounding Upin's death, at first she interprets the name Gangor as Gangauri, the name of the Ganges (of which Gangor is yet another variant) river festival in Rajasthan and which, as Spivak observes, "is similar to ganadharshan or 'rape of the people'.... Behind the bodice is a rape of the people. Here the breast becomes a concept metaphor (rather than a symbol) of police violence in the democratic state" (Spivak in the introduction to the text, xi).

The attempts to characterise the two disempowered subjects as the object of the gaze both of merciless authority, and of the genuinely supportive intellectual, fail when exposed to women whose grotesquely embodied knowledge cannot be accounted for by dominant discourses and terms of representation. Those bodies carry the burdens of realities much more complex than they appear. The power of the stories of Draupadi and Gangor lies in the fact that these women challenge the Indian elites' regime of truth not by threatening to destroy it, but because they reveal the 'weaknesses in their imaginations'.[47] They induce a shock to the agents of power through the indeterminacy, the inconsistencies and anxieties produced as side effects of those forces which keep the violence invisible.

[47] Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (London and New York: Verso, 1998), 50.

From this point of view, Devi's women and narrative technique appear to have gained renewed topicality if one considers later political developments in India. Decades of internal colonisation have paved the way for the creation of very special areas within the country known as SEZs (Special Economic Zones). A policy for them was announced in March 2000 "with a view to augmenting infrastructure facilities for export production.... These SEZs are to be deemed *foreign territory* for tariff and trade operations".[48] At their heart SEZs are financially favoured enclaves for trade transactions whose creation aims to attract foreign investment,[49] yet as Gabriella Waas notes, this also means the presence of "a foreign territory within our territory and many countries within country".[50] Such spaces are marked off as "foreign", that is as distinct or 'outside' regions even if contained from within national boundaries in order to allow for the suspension or rewriting of regular laws and customary practices which normally apply to the rest of Indian territory.[51] Capital interests are identified *tout court* with national progress, in whose name the state is prepared to officially renounce to its sovereignty in order to host 'foreign' territory within its own territory. Practically, however, this does not translate in a cessation of Indian law but, on the contrary, in a strengthening of state grip within those areas, especially through an intensification of military forces. Incidentally, Adivasi territories are the ones which, for their richness in natural resources, are the most frequently converted into SEZs, and many geographical areas like the ones described by Devi have become one. SEZs allow for the bypassing of laws envisioned to protect Adivasis, thus justifying their displacement and forceful land acquisition even in the presence of formal requirements for environmental clearance or areas assigned to tribal people.[52] The creeping process of inner colonialism more sophisticatedly claims its legitimacy on Adivasis and natural resources in ways which, in appearance, formally uphold the rights of tribals. If Devi's women may deserve renewed interest today, the reason may be traced in their making questions exposing the contradictions in the genealogy of the nation, and to which male authority cannot provide an answer. Such hesitation, the pause produced by such questions offers a breach to interrogate the benefits of the epistemological confusion between decolonisation and national development which ultimately legitimates violence towards the weak. To the extent that the process by which Indian historical knowledge suffocate or appropriate those questions, Devi reminds us, the nation will not be able to claim true responsibility for all of its children.

[48] Kulwant Rai Gupta, ed., *Special Economic Zones: Issues, Laws and Procedures*, vol. 2 (Printman: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2008), 483. Emphasis added for emphasis.

[49] Since companies operating within one of those can do so at prices competitive on a global scale.

[50] Gabriella Wass, ed., *Corporate Activity and Human Rights in India* (Shivam Sundaram: Human Rights Law Network, 2011), 87.

[51] It is to be noted, moreover, that each of these zones enjoy the benefit of approving their own financial and environmental laws, which can also differ from one another.

[52] The so-called 'schedule V areas', which by the Indian Constitution cannot be ceded to non-tribals. Recent examples of forceful displacements of Adivasis due to SEZs that can be cited here are the Vedanta Alumina Limited's project of bauxite mining in the Niya-mgiri Hills, Lanjigarh. In 2005 the corporate giant Reliance received thousands of acres of land in Uttar Pradesh, which had agriculturally nurtured native villagers for generations, to erect a power plant. The state of West Bengal has attracted strong criticism for acquiring hundreds of aces of farmers' land in Singur for the Tata group to manufacture cars, it also subtracted land from local farmers to give it to the Salim Group (based in Indonesia) for the setting up of a chemical hub, an event which led to protests to the death of at least 14 villagers, not to mention the injured (Nivedita Menon and Aditya Nigam, *Power and Contestation in India since 1989* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2007), 65-66).

Sanjukta Das Gupta

Customs, Rights and Identity. Adivasi Women in Eastern India

Abstract: This article traces the trajectory of the changing lives of Adivasi women of eastern and central India, i.e., the erstwhile Chotanagpur Division and the Santal Parganas of the Bengal Presidency under colonial times, and which is today incorporated largely within the state of Jharkhand. In India today, Adivasi women figure among some of the most deprived of people living in the margins, much of their vulnerability arising from unequal access to resources, particularly their right to inherit paternal property, and rooted in their socio-economic norms. Colonial rule, on the one hand, witnessed the increasing marginalisation of tribal women with the weakening of the communal indigenous organisations which left them exposed to exploitation of the market forces. On the other hand, it also enabled the empowerment of a section of Adivasi women who asserted their right to inherit ancestral property. In contrast, the politics of indigeneity in contemporary India have imposed restrictions on Adivasi women's bid to claim land rights.

Keywords: *Adivasi women*, *tribe*, *land rights, khuntkatti*

At a conference organised by a local college in Chaibasa in the early years of this century, an articulate woman student raised the issue of land rights for Adivasi women, triggering off a heated debate among scholars and activists gathered there. To the acute discomfort of feminist activists, the consensus among the self-conscious and politically-aware Adivasi women students was that the question of land rights for Adivasi women was yet another insidious attempt by *gairadivasi*s (the non-Adivasi) to introduce alien concepts and customs within Adivasi society, with the aim of bringing about its ultimate destruction.[1] What was therefore an issue concerning women's rights became enmeshed with the larger problematic of Adivasi identity. It was claimed that the problem of women being deprived of inheritance of paternal property did not apply to Adivasi society which had adequate safeguards for protecting women's rights within the indigenous system. It was further argued that concepts such as patriarchy and paternal property are essentially alien to the mental world of Adivasis and their social organisations and hence could not be used to assess the viability of their institutions.

Predictably, NGO activists were up in arms against such arguments, which they believed were not reflective of all sections of Adivasi women, but were merely echoes of the male power wielders. From their wide field experience they talked of socially-sanctioned witch hunts against widows and elderly women to deprive them of their usufructuary rights over land. Such witch-killings could only be controlled if women acquired the right to inherit ancestral property. They further pointed out that in the villages women were in favour of acquiring inheritance rights, but did not publicly voice their demands for fear of social ostracism.

[1] Jyotsna Tirkey, "Jo Adivasi Mahilayon Ka Mamla Nahin Hain Who Gairadivasiyon Dwara Mamla Banaya Ja Raha Hain" ('That which is not a concern of Adivasi women, is made a concern by non-Adivasis', unpublished manuscript, no date).

Such arguments reflect similar concerns long expressed by feminist scholars, as for instance, by Madhu Kishwar, an editor of the feminist journal *Manushi*. In her report on a field-survey of the Ho women of Singhbhum,[2] published in the *Economic and Political Weekly* in 1987, Kishwar portrayed a dismal reality at odds with the popular image of Adivasi women enjoying equality with and respect of their menfolk. Her study placed the issue of the denial of land rights to Adivasi women in the context of women's daily life, work and status within the family and the community. She argued that both the landless poor women as well as those coming from landed families were vulnerable because of the absence of land rights. The extensive interviews which she conducted made it clear that a section of her interviewees indeed believed that land rights for women could ensure their empowerment, but they feared to make public such demands. Such differing points of view – that of Kishwar's informants and that expressed by women students of the early 21st century – bring to focus the sharp schism which is present today in Adivasi society.

[2] Madhu Kishwar, "Toiling Without Rights: Ho Women of Singhbhum", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22.3 (1987), 95-101, 149-55, 194-200.

Some scholars have, for long, believed that the status of women in Adivasi society had, in the distant past, differed substantially from that of women belonging to caste societies, and that it was only in recent times that the emulation of cultural and socio-economic values of caste society led to the loss of those very positive aspects of their own.[3] British rule by bringing Adivasis in contact with the outside world was thereby held responsible for pushing Adivasi society into a male-dominated, hierarchical mould. It was further argued that many of the disabilities from which Adivasi women suffer nowadays are not the consequence of their customs, but were due to the erosion of their traditions under the debilitating land policies of the British. Colonial land settlement operations created a new system of peasant proprietorship with increasingly patrilineal forms of inheritance that destroyed the tradition of land being held collectively by the clan. Since colonial times, the so-called 'tribal' areas were opened to exploitative outsiders, such as mining and industrial companies as well as Hindu peasant groups with greater technical know-how. This had led to increasing land alienation. The resultant scarcity of land had changed the balance of power between Adivasi men and women and permitted the land-controlling tribal menfolk to subjugate women, who now had to provide all the labour in ways never before possible. External political structures and a hierarchical colonial government machinery, with an inherent bias against women, fostered a far less egalitarian and far more repressive social structure, with women at the very bottom of the pyramid.

[3] Ibid. Also see Govind Kelkar and Dev Nathan, *Gender and Tribe: Women, Land and Forests in Jharkhand* (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1991).

While the economic impact of colonial rule, i.e., the intrusion of outsiders and land alienation did, in fact, lead to the marginalisation of tribal women, I would argue that women's subalternity was not only a colonial innovation, but was also intrinsically related to the social-economic systems of the major Adivasi communities which practised settled cultivation. The introduction of colonial legislations, moreover, had a complex impact upon Adivasi societies. On the one

hand, colonial legal policies resulted in the homogenisation of diverse customs and practices, leading to the reification of 'tradition', including that relating to the status of women. On the other hand, it also enabled a questioning of, and attempting to restructure tradition whereby, in certain situations, Adivasis, both women and men, asserted the right of women to inherit ancestral property and to leadership positions within their community institutions. This can be contrasted to the situation in post-Independence India where the politics of indigeneity often ensures the suppression of Adivasi women's rights over ancestral property, though not their usufructory rights, in the interests of community solidarity.[4] This transition within Adivasi society will be explored in the following three sections. The first outlines the land systems in 19th century Jharkhand, the second highlights some of the challenges faced by the tribal 'patriarchy' under colonial rule, while the final section traces the post-Independence developments.

[4] Nandini Sundar, "Adivasi Politics and State Responses: Historical Processes and Contemporary Concerns", in Sanjukta Das Gupta and Raj Sekhar Basu, eds., *Narratives from the Margins: Aspects of Adivasi History in India* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2012), 237-254.

Adivasi Land Ownership in Jharkhand

The Adivasi pattern of land inheritance in Jharkhand, particularly among the larger land-owning groups, as depicted in the studies of the colonial administrators and ethnographers and anthropologists of the 19th and 20th centuries, was discriminatory against women in various ways. Adivasi communities were deeply attached to their own village, membership to which conferred upon them a distinct social and cultural identity. Survival in hostile surroundings required security, economic sustainability, social cohesion and co-operation. The village ensured all of these requirements, and very importantly, by housing the ancestral spirits, it conferred upon its residents a sense of continuity and belonging across generations. Thus, to the Hos, the Mundas, the Santals and the Oraons, the village did not merely signify a geographical space that they occupied. It was a religiously defined boundary, a cultural space, blessed both by village spirits and by ancestors and it determined the nature of their relationships both within and outside their own community.

The village organisation was partly designed to ensure control of the village founders over local resources. Generally speaking, the founding families, the *khuntkattidars*, enjoyed in Chotanagpur special privileges and rights which had a ritual status, being interwoven into the religious observances and customs of the people. Customary laws prevented the descendants from the mother's side and other later settlers from gaining access to the village land. The primacy of the original descent group was institutionalised by reserving for itself the posts of the key village functionaries, namely that of the headman, variously known as the *munda* or the *manjhi*, and the priest (the *pahan* or *deuri*). Although their position was hereditary, their status was that of *primus inter pares*, the first among equals.

Tribal egalitarianism is therefore a valid concept when applied to the original descent group. Even so, gender inequalities imposed limits on the egalitarianism of

the original descent group. It can be argued that women's subalternity in Adivasi society did not arise from external factors, but was intrinsic to the social norms of the communities. The customary tribal laws regarding land and inheritance appeared to reinforce the rights of the patrilineal male descendants to the lands cleared by an ancestor. Primogeniture in the male line was strictly practised and the daughters and descendants on the wife's side of the family were excluded from inheritance. This ensured the control of the families of the original settlers over precious village resources. That this practice was integral to the traditional tribal organisation was reaffirmed by several colonial observers. For instance, S. J. Manook, an Assistant Commissioner of Singhbhum in the mid-19th century, noted that the major tribal communities could not dispose of their land as they chose, and it had to descend to their sons and grandsons; in the absence of a direct male issue, the land went to the mother (i.e. with a life interest) or next of kin.[5] The Chotanagpur Commissioner, E.T. Dalton, had similarly observed that the prevailing custom of inheritance among the Hos of Singhbhum was an equal division of property among the sons.[6] Thus, women's disqualification to landed property arose primarily from the need of the descent groups to keep intact their control over land. Since daughters passed out of the patrilineal family through the act of marriage, they were debarred from participating in the sacrificial offerings to ancestral spirits of their father's family and, therefore, had no claim to a share of the property left by their father or any other member of their father's clan.

Within Adivasi society, the restricted property rights of women were sanctified through religious beliefs, as the anthropologist Sarat Chandra Roy had shown in his study of the Oraons.[7] According to Oraon tradition, the living and dead members of the same exogamous clan in any particular village together formed one village family. Oraons believed that the human spirit, after dissolution of the physical body, lived in the underworld together with the spirits of the deceased ancestors of the same clan of a village. The spirits were believed to derive nutrition from the essence of the offerings made to them by their male descendants daily before every regular meal, periodically at certain sacrificial feasts, and annually at the great 'male bone burial' festival. Thus, the spirits of the dead remained in contact with their property and were concerned that it went to their male descendants. If after marriage a daughter of the family stealthily took away to her husband's place any property belonging to her father or brothers, she would be pursued by the spirit of her father's village and sickness and other affliction was sure to be caused in her husband's family.

Exclusion from property rights did not, however, imply a loss of social and economic freedoms. Unlike caste society, Adivasi communities in Chotanagpur and Santal Parganas did not restrict the freedom of women in material pursuits.[8] Women were not precluded from ownership of movables and widows and unmarried daughters also had a right to maintenance.[9] Nor was there any social prejudice regarding women's participation in different aspects of the household

[5] S. J. Manook, 3 September 1895, Revenue Proceedings Nos. 113-114, January 1896, Government of Bengal, West Bengal State Archives, India.

[6] Edward T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (Calcutta: Indian Studies Past and Present, 1973 [1872]), 211.

[7] Sarat Chandra Roy, *The Oraons of Chota Nagpur: Their History, Economic Life and Social Organisation* (Ranchi: Bar Library, 1915).

[8] For details see Kelkar and Nathan, *Gender and Tribe*, Shashank S. Sinha, *Restless Mothers and Turbulent Daughters: Situating Tribes in Gender Studies* (Kolkata: Stree, 2005), Sanjukta Das Gupta, *Adivasis and the Raj: Socio-economic Transition of the Hos, 1820-1932* (Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011), 42-46.

[9] Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, 211.

and the village economy. Adivasi women, in fact, enjoyed a lot of respect in these domains. This has been reflected in nearly all contemporary studies on tribal societies carried out in course of colonial rule. It had been observed, for instance, that Santal women "were supreme in household affairs"[10] and also that in household matters a tribal woman's voice was as important as her husband's. Her influence was often decisive while arranging marriages.[11] The same was the case with the Hos. Hayes, the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum thus observed, "A Kol or Ho makes regular companion of his wife. She is consulted in all difficulties and receives the fullest consideration due to her sex".[12]

Women enjoyed a large area of unrestricted freedom beyond the domestic sphere as well. In by far the greater spheres of life, an Adivasi woman was free to enjoy her life as a woman. She could go about alone, she could dance in public, she could take and sell her wares to the market, she could smoke and drink in public, she enjoyed sexual freedom, she could also participate in village meetings on equal terms with the men. This stood in sharp contrast to the restrictions on movement imposed on women belonging to caste societies, particularly to the upper castes. Nor were there many restrictions on women in participating in the economic concerns of the village – in agriculture or fishing. Collection of forest produce, particularly timber used by Adivasis as fuel, was often largely done by women as was the making of rice beer which was of vital significance in the day-to-day life as also in the collective cultural life. Fishing, in particular, was a communal activity and wives accompanying husbands on fishing expeditions, or sisters their brothers did not as a rule assist each other alone, for it was a joint activity and the women helped the men irrespective of their relationship. However, such assistance was usually confined to the village or clan group.[13] Conventionally a division of labour in fishing was adhered to. Women usually carried pots of liquor, or *diang,* and the men carried the nets and the traps. Fishing in deep water was done by men, while women usually fished in slow running water. Similarly in the case of agriculture, men normally undertook ploughing harvesting, threshing and husking rice, while women carried out the weeding and transplanting. However, there was no rigid division of labour among Adivasis of Singhbhum, and as the anthropologist D. N. Majumdar observed in the mid-20th century, increasingly men's occupations were done by women.[14] In many ways a woman's life in tribal society seemed to him to be a drudgery. The basis of economic division of labour appeared to be that the men did the more creative and interesting work, while the women performed the routine tasks. In all economic operations, men led and women followed. Thus the ploughing was done by men, the breaking up of the clods of earth was done by women. Sowing was done by men, weeding by women.[15] The distribution of the produce, like its apportionment, was arranged by men while the women carried out the instructions. The men cleared the forest, the women followed them for gathering fruit and roots. The men planted the fruit trees and vegetables, the

[10] W. J. Culshaw, *Tribal Heritage: a Study of the Santals* (London: Lutterworth Publishers, 1949), 29.

[11] William George Archer, *Tribal Law and Justice: A Report on the Santal* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing House, 1984), 129.

[12] Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal,* 202.

[13] Direndra Nath Majumdar, *The Affairs of a Tribe: A Study in Tribal Dynamics* (Lucknow: Universal Publishers, 1950), 59.

[14] Ibid, 65.

[15] Ibid, 67.

women collected the fruits and sold them according to the needs of the family. When men did the rougher work, the women supplemented their labour.

There were, however, certain economic taboos which were, however, inviolable. Women were denied the right to touch the plough or the bow and arrow – implements of vital necessity in agriculture and hunting. A woman could not touch the plough for if she did the plough would lose its virtue. Ploughs were therefore never taken inside the house, but were placed under some big tree near the village burial ground or *sasan*. Similarly, touching the bow and arrow was proscribed for Adivasi women. An occupation normally forbidden to women was the rearing of cocoons for tussor silk. It was also taboo to touch a woman while rearing cocoons and strict sexual continence was insisted upon during this activity. The men thus retired to a quiet part of the forest while rearing cocoons in order to follow their profession unhindered. Nor could women take part in any productive enterprise – work in the fields or prepare rice beer – during their menstrual period.

Women's subalternity in Adivasi society related particularly to taboos on participation in the ritual life of the people. The ritual domain, both familial and collective, was severely restricted for women. Among Santals, a significant family-centred ritual was ancestor worship in the 'sacred closet' or the *bhitar* within the dwelling place. According to the Santal Guru Kolean's narrative, "the sacred closet is for ancestors to stay hidden in ... In this closet they make a small enclosure and that is the real place for the ancestors to stay hidden in".[16] Women had only limited entry to this sacred place. These traditions persisted even as late as the 1920s and '30s, despite the many changes that the village society had meanwhile undergone.

[16] Paul Olaf Bodding, Lars Olsen Skrefsrud, Sten Konow, *Traditions and Institutions of the Santals* (Delhi: Bahumukhi Prakashan, 1994 [1942]), 89.

The new bride similarly had to undergo numerous rituals before being formally admitted to the family. Among the Hos, for instance, the bride's formal admittance to the clan group, or *killi*, required participation in certain ceremonial gatherings and tribal feasts. As long as she was not formally admitted to the *killi* she had certain disabilities with regard to the family, the clan and the village. She would not be allowed to enter into the family's sacred enclosure, the *ading*, the abode of the sacred spirits, the Oa Bongas. Nor could she perform the traditionally prescribed daily rites, otherwise it was feared that the family spirits would become enraged and harm the members concerned. During the time of the Maghe and Baha festivals when the whole village took part in the ceremonial feasting, the bride could be formally admitted to the clan through the ceremonial worship of the village deity, Dessauli, and Sing Bonga (the Supreme Spirit) by the village priest or through worship done by the family itself. Only then would she be allowed to enter the family *ading*. Another striking discrimination against women was in respect of the practice of erecting stone slabs or *sasandiri* over burial places. This was an important ritual confining and perpetuating the indissoluble link of Adivasis with their ancestral village. No *sasandiri* was, however, put up in the memory of unmarried girls and spinsters. Nor was it erected in the memory of married women in the burial ground of her husband's village. Another instance of women's

exclusion from collective ritual was the non-existence of any direct role of theirs in communal sacrifices, though they did participate in the preparation.

Taking into account all these complexities, the romanticised view of a homogeneous and egalitarian tribal society in pre-colonial and colonial times does not hold. Although Adivasis of Chotanagpur differed from the Hindu caste hierarchical society, their village organisation was not characterised by equality among all sections of the tribal population. Egalitarianism did exist among the core group of founding families in the village, but, in general, clear lines of differentiation had been created over the issue of control of village resources.

The Impact of Colonial Rule

Colonial rule significantly impinged upon tribal society in various ways. Although Adivasis had never been completely insulated from the regional economy, the expanding linkages to the wider polity and economy under colonial rule created new stresses and strains within the tribal village society which, in turn, led to a distortion and gradual decay of their communal organisations. The penetration of the market economy, the commercial exploitation of the mineral and forest wealth of the region, the intrusion of alien outsiders, extension of railways, urbanisation and the introduction of British law and justice all left their mark on the tribal society, and thus, on the status of tribal women. The extension of the economy certainly widened women's sphere of economic activities but did not substantially affect their ritual status within the tribe. Simultaneously, the colonial period witnessed an increasing marginalisation of tribal women. The weakening of the traditional communal organisations deprived women of the protection of the village community and left them exposed to exploitation of the market forces. Gender inequalities, therefore, tended to be sharpened as a consequence of colonial rule.

While alien concepts of the market economy threatened Adivasi societies, social transformation through the introduction of English education and Christianisation[17] enabled certain sections of the Adivasis to grapple with these changes and reinvent their community identity. Throughout the 19th century the colonial government made a concerted attempt to identify custom and establish rights of Adivasis which would be in keeping their traditions.[18] Such an attempt inevitably led to a homogenisation of laws relating to tribal areas since the customs of dominant communities were taken to be the standard that was sought to be applied uniformly over various different communities with divergent traditions and histories. As Carol Upadhyay argues, the provisions regarding 'tribal custom and usages' in fact largely drew upon the model of tribal social organisation developed by colonial administrators and missionaries, especially by the German Jesuit missionary Father Hoffmann, during the late-19th and early-20th centuries.[19]

[17] For details on Christianisation among Adivasis, see Marine Carrin and Harald Tambs-Lyche, *An Encounter of Peripheries: Santals, Missionaries and Their Changing Worlds* (Delhi: Manohar, 2008).

[18] For a discussion of the framing of colonial land settlement laws concerning Adivasis of Chotanagpur see Carol Upadhyay, "Law, Custom and Adivasi Identity: Politics of Land Rights in Chotanagpur", in Nandini Sundar, ed., *Legal Grounds: Natural Resources, Identity and the Law in Jharkhand* (Delhi: Oxford U. P. 2009), 30-55. For the Hos of Singhbhum, see Sanjukta Das Gupta, "Rethinking Adivasi Identity: The Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act (1908) and Its Aftermath among the Hos of Singhbhum", in Biswamoy Pati, ed., *Adivasis in Colonial India: Survival, Resistance and Negotiation* (Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011), 88-111.

[19] Upadhyay, "Law, Custom and Adivasi Identity", 34-36. Also see, Vinita Damodaran, "Colonial Constructions of the 'Tribe' in India: The Case of Chotanagpur", in Biswamoy Pati, ed., *Adivasis in Colonial India: Survival, Resistance and Negotiation* (Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011), 83-86.

The 19th century colonial discourse of rights was not specifically concerned with women's rights. Patriarchy and primogeniture tended to be fixed as the principal guiding feature of tribal property rights, and, as land gained a market value land ownership came to be viewed as the single most significant signifier of wealth, even in tribal communities. Moreover, throughout the 19th century Adivasis came to be gradually alienated from their lands as a result of both government acquisition of forests and the slow, yet steady, intrusion of non-tribals into the Adivasi regions. These changes increased the vulnerability of Adivasi women, yet paradoxically served to empower certain sections of Adivasi women who attempted to claim legal rights for themselves. Such attempts were particularly significant among Christianised tribal communities.

Several instances of challenges to the conventional land-holding mores can be found in the colonial archives, particularly in the regional record rooms in Jharkhand where village records of civil disputes give an intimate picture of the quotidian life of Adivasis. The land settlement report of 1897 in Kolhan Government Estate, for instance, cites a large number of cases in which daughters had been found sharing in the father's property with the full approval of the village community.[20] In 1907-08, a group of fourteen women in Choya village in Gumra pir, Kolhan, claimed headship of the *lakhiraj* (rent free) village after the death of their father, who had been the former headman. The Deputy Commissioner, however, felt that the principle of allowing a Hindu widow a life interest should not be treated as a precedent in the case of a tribal family since it was 'recognised' in tribal custom that no female could inherit the village headmanship.[21] Despite such instances, therefore, the colonial government refused to legislate in favour of women's claims and the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (CNTA) of 1908, which aimed at aimed at safeguarding local customary rights and usages, and reaffirmed the hold of tribal males on land. Enacted nine years after Birsa Munda's *ulgulan* (rebellion), it intended to provide a degree of protection to the Chotanagpur Adivasis by making *khuntkatti* tenures secure against encroachments of landlords by fixing their rents in perpetuity and making illegal the sale of these lands for any purpose other than arrears of rent. Rights in land were thereby legally recognised as 'hereditary and inalienable' and had to descend on the sons and the next male kin. In practice this meant that the more powerful families in the village could grab the land.

However, a challenge to tradition continued to be posed by tribal women, who in certain cases disputed their menfolk in the colonial courts over formal land rights. Tribal women attacked customary rights in various ways. The settlement papers of 1913-18 in Kolhan Government Estate reveal instances of land being registered in the names of Ho women.[22] There were instances when married women sought their right to continue their title over parental property although, according to custom, they held usufructuary rights only so long as they remained unmarried.[23] In some cases, women even denied that they were married so as to remain in possession of their maintenance plots. There was also an instance of a

[20] J. A. Craven, *Final Report on the Settlement of the Kolhan Government Estate in District Singhbhum of the Year 1897* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1898).

[21] Tanaza Papers, K11 S1 13823 of 1907-08, Papers Relating to the Resettlement of the Kolhan Government Estate 1913-18, Chaibasa Collectorate Record Room, Chaibasa.

[22] Craven, *Final Report on the Settlement of the Kolhan Government Estate.*

[23] Case No 68 of 1906, Court of the Deputy Collector, Serial 229 of 1906, Records of Kolhan Suits and Appeals, Class I, Chaibasa Collectorate Record Room, Chiabasa.

widow staking a claim to the right to the first husband's property even after marrying a second time. Furthermore, Ho women claimed the right to gift, mortgage and sell property under their possession, subverting tribal norms. In many such civil suits, the colonial settlement court in Chaibasa ruled in favour of women litigants.

A similar tendency of a rethinking regarding the laws of inheritance could be noted among Santals. Taking credit for this change, the Swedish missionary Bodding wrote: "the Santals are changing and in many ways developing ... They feel that the old rules do not cover all present day circumstances and do not always carry them satisfactorily through, and they wish something more just and advanced; this is the case with regard to the rights of their women".[24] W. G. Archer, the Deputy Commissioner of Santal Parganas from 1942 to 1945 similarly observed such a tendency during his tenure. He stated that the patrilineal system of inheritance had been gradually changing in Santal Parganas and pointed out that the revision settlement operations of 1922-35, popularly known as *Gantzer Settlement Report* had recorded women as owners, ignoring local customs. Quoting from Gantzer, Archer asserted:

> The rules against female succession among the Santals whether Christian or non-Christians are changing owing to the force of public opinion, and the rules which have been previously accepted, cannot be treated as hard and fast and binding for all time. The change which is occurring is in the direction of ameliorating the condition of women and giving them a more assured footing in the family.[25]

[24] Paul O. Bodding, "Some Remarks on the Position of Women among the Santals", in Jospeh Troisi, ed., *The Santals: Readings in Tribal Life*, Vol. 6 (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1979), 248-249.

[25] Archer, *Tribal Law and Justice,* 684-685.

Nevertheless, there was continuous opposition to women's attempts to secure land rights. During the settlement operations the male agnates opposed the registration of land in the names of women owners. In some cases they refused to recognise the claims of widows as sole owners. They were required to be registered in their late husbands' names so as to indicate that they had inherited their late husband's property which would revert to her male relatives after their death. In another case, a widow wished to enlist her daughter's name as a *khorposhdar* (a holder of a maintenance grant) for certain plots sufficient to maintain her until her death.[26] Taking into consideration both tribal custom and women's claims to land rights, Gantzer fixed certain rules of property in his settlement report. He stated:

> where a Santal women has been recorded as wife of so and so, she holds a widow's right as if she were a Hindu widow. Where a Santal woman has been recorded as daughter of so and so she may be taken to have full rights of inheritance somewhat in the manner of a women inheriting *stridhan* [moveable property received on marriage] property under the Hindu law. The question of succession in such cases is still somewhat in doubt as the system is new, but there seems little doubt that if she dies issueless, Santal sentiment would prefer that the property should revert to her nearest male relations.[27]

[26] Ibid., 685.

[27] Ibid., 686.

While it is true that impact of colonial rule was partially responsible for the changing attitude of the Santals, it appears that the government generally preferred to adopt a policy of non-interference. Whenever any objection arose against registering a daughter's name as owner, the officers recorded her as enjoying rights of usage and maintenance and not as owner. Gantzer pointed out:

> In dealing with such cases of this nature the custom adapted in a particular locality must be carefully considered. It would be unwise to force upon an unwilling litigant a decision in advance of custom. If a change in custom has been well established and generally accepted it will of course be treated as the customary law of the locality in mitigation of the harshness of the ancient tribal law.[28]

[28] Ibid., 685.

Here we find that the 'customary law of the locality' is contrasted to the 'ancient tribal law'. When custom was 'adapted in a particular locality', it apparently ceased to be 'tribal', i.e. 'ancient' and 'harsh'. This would imply that the British were aware that new customs were being produced under the colonial impact. Thus under colonial rule, there were new trends in various phases and forms: homogenisation of tribal customs, impact of Hindu customs, economic changes pertaining to land availability and land market, alien intrusion, the legal concept of ownership, spread of Christian ideas of women's protection. All of these went in direction of acknowledging land rights to women as well, at least in certain cases where the whole community felt the impact, and at times even despite British reluctance and preoccupation with avoiding open challenges to 'custom' and 'tradition' – things that they themselves had profoundly altered. The British legal culture was based on customary law; hence they needed to ascertain (and fixate) what the customs were in a certain area over a certain period. Tradition and custom thus served as areas of shared sovereignty: the British imposed new laws and spread new ideas, but they became 'custom' and acquired a legal value only when local society accepted them.

Post-Independence Developments

After Independence, the Congress government declared its intention of replacing the old policy of status-quo and adopting the policy of development and tribal integration, while preserving the tribal people's distinct social and cultural heritage. What was aimed at was creating conditions in which tribal societies could grow naturally, free form both external impositions and internal inhibitions.[29] Specifying the rights and privileges of the tribal communities, the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Constitution provided a degree of protection for tribals in the 'partially

[29] B. K. Roy Burman, "Perspective and Programme for the Development of Adivasis", in *The Tribal People of India* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Government of India, 1973), 180.

excluded areas' of middle India and autonomy to the 'excluded areas of the northeast respectively. The Constitution provided a framework with a three-pronged strategy of improving the situation of the 'Scheduled Tribes' consisting of protective arrangements, affirmative action and development, while preserving the tribal people's distinct social and cultural heritage.

In practice, however, there was a renewed phase of conservatism and the post-Independence government in India continued with the earlier colonial policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of Adivasi societies. However, a number of laws on the rights of unmarried Adivasi women and widows did emerge in the Chotanagpur region. K. S. Singh argues that this was enabled through the application of the Hindu Succession Act to sections of Hinduised tribals and of Christian laws to converted tribals.[30] However, in more recent times, such initiatives have tended to be thwarted on one account or the other.

[30] K. S. Singh, "Land Rights of Tribal Women", *Human Science, Journal of Anthropological Survey of India*, 37.3 (1988).

Despite constitutional provisions for the protection of Adivasi landholdings, Adivasis of Jharkhand and other states of central India have since Independence encountered the threat of land alienation which occurred in two ways: first through fraudulent acquisition by non-tribal landlords, moneylenders and traders, and secondly in the form of sales and leases to state-sponsored industries, mining interests and commercial interests. Such land-alienations are particularly significant for Adivasi women experience greater vulnerability in face of displacement. The specific problems of Adivasi women acquire a different contour when confronted by changes in the political climate of the country, which in turn affects gender relations and roles.

As Tanika Sarkar points out, a consequence of the fundamentalisation of politics by the Hindu right-wing is that women's individual rights have come under scrutiny in contemporary India. Their attempts to claim rights are portrayed as countering the larger interests of the family and the nation. In the fundamentalist discourse, equality has been further redefined to mean harmony. A woman who chose to exercise her right as an individual was depicted as betraying these interests, and causing disharmony.[31] Likewise, regional political parties and identity movements in Jharkhand have increasingly imposed restrictions on Adivasi women's bid to claim land rights for themselves. Male agnates have successfully resisted woman's land rights on the ground that land belongs to the lineage that had reclaimed it. They have asserted that the transfer of interest to women will undermine the foundation of the tribal social order.[32] Even within their own localities, Adivasis today are losing ground to outsiders, a process that has significant economic and political implications. Moreover, one of the ways non-tribals fraudulently acquire tribal land is through marriage with tribal women, whom they then desert after the completion of the transaction.[33] Resistance to women's land rights thus also arises out of a desire to restrict alienation of tribal land. The Supreme Court's attempts to intervene in favour of land rights for tribal women have, therefore, not received the support of even reformists in tribal

[31] Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia, eds., *Women and the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays* (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1995).

[32] K. S. Singh, "Tribal Women: Resurrection, Demystification and Gender Struggle", in Aparna Basu and Anup Taneja, eds., *Breaking Out of Invisibility: Women in Indian History* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research/Northern Book Centre, 2002), 227.

[33] Virginius Xaxa, "Women and Gender in the Study of Tribes in India", in Mary E. John, ed., *Women's Studies in India: A Reader* (New Delhi: Penguin books, 2008) 480.

societies who seek for changes in women's position in tribal society.[34] To escape these restrictions, there have been situations as Srimati Basu has shown, when Adivasi women have had to assume a Hindu identity as a convenient device in order to secure property.[35]

The tools employed to control 'deviant' women are social ostracism, accusation of witchcraft and outcasting. 'Ostracised' women do not find anyone to plough their fields, thatch their roof, assist them in essential rituals, or even to procure food in times of scarcity.[36] Controlling deviant women through organised acts of violence, such as witch hunts is a common practice throughout tribal regions, and as recent researches have shown, the threat of being declared a 'witch' is a powerful weapon to induce conformism.[37] As Nitya Rao argues, in Adivasi societies throughout eastern India today the construct of the 'good woman' is popularised as one who does not make attempts to claim or inherit land.[38]

Concluding Remarks

The issue of women's land rights as a form of empowerment is very significant today and is likely to become more so in the future. India's agrarian transition has had serious gendered inequalities embedded within the process arising particularly from unequal land distribution. Bina Agarwal argues that land rights could indeed make a notable difference to women's bargaining power within the home and community and enable them to better negotiate the wage labour market and she notes that empowerment has emerged wherever rural women have gained access to land.[39] She strongly asserts that women's land rights deserve policy attention even if women themselves do not identify this as a priority. It is critically important to recognise that the deprived may have incomplete information about the options available to them. Yet, the dangers of intervention is revealed in Madhu Kishwar's own experience when as the editor of *Manushi* she filed a petition in the Supreme Court in 1981 on behalf of a Ho woman Maki Bui and her daughter, Sonamuni, who lived in Lonjo village in Singhbum District whereby they challenged the denial of equal inheritance rights to women of the Ho tribe. The upshot of this move was constant harassment of Maki Bui from her male agnates and non-availability of any assistance on part of the local administration. Finally she was forced to move from Lonjo village and a few years later died in mysterious circumstances. This tragic tale outlines the dangers of intervention from outside without adequate support within the community. Thus perhaps the need of the day is to develop a new social consensus in favour of Adivasi women's land rights within the community and family.

[34] Dev Nathan, "Jharkhand: Factor and Futures", in Ram Dayal Munda and S. Bosu Mullick, eds., *The Jharkhand Movement: The Indigenous People's Struggle for Autonomy in India* (Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2003) 130.

[35] In the case, 'Gopal Singh Bhumij vs Ginibala Bhumij', Ginibala Bhumij had to "show that the family and/or other Bhumij's of the village and/or neighbouring villages have adopted Hindu religion and have been following all rites and customs normally followed by Hindus". Srimati Basu, *She Comes to Take Her Rights: Indian Women, Property and Propriety* (Delhi: Kali for Women), 2001.

[36] Madhu Kishwar, "Toiling Without Rights", 101.

[37] For a discussion of witchcraft in Adivasi societies see, Ajay Skaria, "Shades of Wilderness: Tribe, Caste and Gender in Western India", *The Journal of Asian Studies,* 56.3 (August 1997), 726-745; Kelkar and Nathan, *Gender and Tribe;* Soma Chaudhuri, *Witches, tea Plantations and Lives of Migrant Labourers in India* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013); Shashank S. Sinha, "Adivasis and Witchcraft in Chotanagpur, 1850-1950", Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Delhi, 2010.

[38] Nitya Rao, *Good Women Do Not Inherit Land: Politics of Land and Gender in India* (Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2008).

[39] Bina Agarwal, "Gender and Land Rights Revisited: Exploring New Prospects via the State, Family and Market", *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 3.1 (January and April 2003), 184-224.

Shashank S. Sinha

Culture of Violence or Violence of Cultures? Adivasis and Witch-hunting in Chotanagpur

Abstract: On account of its inability to conform to the 'rational', 'objective', and 'scientific' notions of history, witch-hunting has remained marginalised in the mainstream historical research. This article examines an aspect of witch-hunting – violence – that has not only led to the construction of certain cultural stereotypes around Adivasis, but has also raised debates related to human rights and culturally-sanctioned violence. Focusing upon the Chotanagpur region, which formed the 'Adivasi heartland' of the state of Bihar, and later the state of Jharkhand, it explores the nature and structure of violence related to witch hunting from around 1850s to present times. It looks into questions related to production of such violence alongside its manifestations, elements and constituencies over a period of time. With the help of some case studies, it also shows how such violence continues to acquire new forms and meanings.

Keywords: *Chotanagpur*, *tribal women, witchcraft*, *witch-hunting*

Introduction

One of the most serious constraints underlining research on witchcraft in India is that of sources. Absence of testimonies of women accused or killed on grounds of witchcraft suspicion is a serious handicap. In Europe, witchcraft was considered as *crimem exceptum* and witches were tried by the judiciary. Judicial records, wherever available, therefore serve as useful source of information. In India, the suspects were/are mostly killed in 'public trials' and in the judicial trials conducted after the killing, the emphasis was/has been on attempt to fix the responsibility for the 'murder'. No information is available on how the accused felt. Such records also do not say much about the tensions in the village, the personality of people accused of witchcraft, or of the many out-of-court settlements.[1] Building on a fragmentary source base, this article explores the trajectory of witch hunting over a century and half to look at questions of violence.

The article is divided into five sections. The first section discusses the linkages between gender and constructions of witchcraft among the Adivasis. The second studies witch hunts in the context of Adivasi socio-cultural milieu. The third section examines the role of other agents and factors which contributed, directly or indirectly, to the production and unfolding of such violence. The fourth part deals with the revival of witch hunts in postcolonial Jharkhand[2] and its implications. The concluding section emphasises the need to develop a framework for understanding witch hunting while underscoring its attributes and complex nature.

[1] Ajay Skaria, "Women, Witchcraft and Gratuitous Violence in Colonial Western India", *Past and Present*, 155 (May 1997), 110, 135.

[2] The districts that were separated from Bihar to form the new state of Jharkhand included Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Singhbhum, Dhanbad, Palamau and Santal Parganas. Santal Parganas did not form a part of the colonial Chotanagpur, but it is included in most studies on the region on account of geo-cultural similarity and contiguous spread of Adivasi population. The Adivasis of the region are mostly patrilineal and include tribes like Mundas, Santhals, Oraon, Ho, Khariya, Pahariya, Maler, etc.

Constructions of Witchcraft

Belief in *bongas* (spirits, godlings) and *dains* (witches) formed an integral part of the religious and cosmological world of the Adivasis. Deeply ingrained in popular folklore, they played an important role in the ordering of social and economic relations and significantly informed their perceptions of health, medicine, and disease. Fear of *bongas* not only underlined celebration of all festivals, religious observances, ceremonies and rituals, but also played an important part in their economic life − agricultural operations, hunting, food-gathering. One of the chief functions of the Adivasi festivals was to win over the *bongas* and neutralise their harmful intentions. The central idea behind the Adivasi religious systems was to seek an alliance with the highest and the most 'helpful' spiritual entities and through them control the 'harmful' ones.[3] The evil powers had to be scared through exorcism or magic.[4] Adivasis thus made a distinction between 'white magic' (socially and psychologically beneficent) and 'black magic' (maleficent or evil): the minister of white magic was the medicine-man known as *ojha* or diviner, while one of black magic was the *dain*, a witch or sorcerer.[5]

Witches and witchcraft were almost exclusively common among the patrilineal agricultural communities (like the Mundas, Hos, and Santals), while remarkably absent among the nomadic foraging communities (such as the Birhor or Erenga Munda).[6] The constructions of witches were intrinsically connected to patriarchal structuring of Adivasi societies. In spite of Dalton's assertion that 'it is not only women that are accused of having dealings with the imps of darkness', witches hailed mostly from among the women. While a witch could be of either sex among the Mundas, Oraons, Hos, among Santals they were exclusively women.[7] Also, while both men and women could be potential witches, the language of the constructions of witchcraft kept the female dominant. Thus the words colloquially used to describe witches, more often than not, were *dain* (female) as opposed to *bishaha* (male). The fact that the traditional witch doctors (variously known as *ojhas, sokhas, deoklis, deonars, matis, or jan gurus*) were exclusively males also underlines the importance of gender tensions in the constructions of witchcraft, reinforced in the various myths regarding the origin of witchcraft among the Adivasis.

According to the Santal myth, women (dressed as men) duped the mountain spirit, Maran Buru, into teaching them witchcraft and acquired the art by an 'act of treachery'. Later realising this the spirit trained the men into the art of witch finding. The 'Legend of Baranda Bonga', popular among the Hos and Mundas, underscores that witches were by nature evil and notorious and could be controlled only with the help of *sokhas*. Even the Supreme Bonga (*Singa Bonga*) could not control his witch wife despite all his powers. Another legend, *Asur Kahani*, establishes that all evil spirits were incarnates of women, primarily Asur widows. Among other things, these myths reiterated the construction of women as witches and men as witch doctors and contained strong elements of gendered contestation.

[3] Sarat Chandra Roy, "Magic and Witchcraft in Chotanagpur", *Man in India*, 33.3 (1984 [1914]), 93.

[4] J. Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Beliefs and Practices Among the Santals* (New Delhi: Manohar: 1979), 204.

[5] Ibid.

[6] S. Bosu Mullick, "Gender Relations and Witches among the Indigenous Communities of Jharkhand, India", in Govind Kelkar, Dev Nathan and Pierre Walter, eds., *Gender Relations in Forest Societies in Asia: Patriarchy at Odds* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), 120. For links between patriarchy and agriculture in Adivasi communities of Chotanagpur, see Shashank Shekhar Sinha, *Restless Mothers and Turbulent Daughters: Situating Tribes in Gender Studies* (Kolkata: Stree, 2006), 34-38.

[7] Troisi, *Tribal Religion*, 217-18.

Women's body and sexuality also formed an important component in constructions of witchcraft. In contrast to A. L. Barstow's assertion that witch persecutions in Europe were part of a 'deep-rooted misogyny' and involved the punishment of women for their sexuality,[8] elements of organised misogyny or 'sexual terrorism', could not be seen at least in 19th century colonial Chotanagpur. Nevertheless such constructions were certainly reflective of some kind of distrust of women and a fear of their sexuality. Among the Santals, it was believed that witches had sexual liaisons with the *bongas*[9] while among the Mundas, Oraons and Hos, women were seen as 'spiritually weak' and 'lacking in moral integrity' and therefore susceptible to possession by *bongas*.[10] Such notions were also common to both Catholic and Protestant constructions of womanhood in Europe. Elizabeth Reis, in her study of Puritan New England, argues that the Puritan construction of soul as 'feminine' and 'insatiable' was "in consonance with the allegedly unappeasable nature of women". On account of their passive spirituality and weaker bodies, "the devil could reach women's souls more easily and breach these 'weaker vessels' with greater frequency".[11] Sarah Ferber points to a similar connection between female passivity and vulnerability to the Devil in the context of Catholic Reformation.[12]

Drawing linkages between healing and witchcraft was not unknown in Chotanagpur. In Europe, one of the popular strands in writings–common among feminist writers, historians, and religious leaders–was that most women condemned as witches during the classic period of witch persecution (1500-1700) were in actuality unlicensed healers suppressed by the male medical establishment.[13] Studies from different regions in also India hint at/point to women's shamanistic roles. Verrier Elwin talks about Saora women's shamanism and that they were custodians of black magic and had unrivalled knowledge of herbs and plants.[14] In Chotanagpur, women's relationship with nature and forests, and their knowledge of roots, herbs and plants (particularly the medicinal ones), was quite established in the community domain and belief system.[15] Witchcraft definitely served as an idiom for exclusion of women from the medical profession. However there is not much evidence of an organised persecution of women shamans.

Besides their professional attributes and behavioural patterns, physical characteristics also formed an important part of the construction of witches. Those who were hyper-normal or of abnormal mental ability were regarded as intermediaries between the human and the unseen world, but there were also people suspected to be born with the 'evil eye' or 'mouth'.[16] Persons with unusual physical traits formed a vulnerable group. Generally old women with penetrating gazes, or those who were misshapen were most likely to be taken as witches.[17] They could easily fit in the 'old hag' image of witches. But childless widows or single or unprotected women were also accused of being witches. Barren women, the aged or infirm, and those who had long lived as widows were considered as

[8] Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witchhunts* (San Francisco: Pandora, 1994).

[9] Edward G. Man, *Sonthalia and the Sonthals* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1983 [1867]), 152; W. G. Archer, *The Hill of Flutes, Life, Love and Poetry in Tribal India: A Portrait of the Santals* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1974), 292.

[10] Roy, "Magic and Witchcraft", 120.

[11] Elizabeth Reis, "Damned Women in Puritan New England", in Darren Oldridge, ed., *The Witchcraft Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 261-62.

[12] Sarah Ferber, "Ecstasy, Possession, and Witchcraft", in Oldridge, ed., *The Witchcraft Reader*, 230-39.

[13] See Jane P. Davidson, "The Myth of the Persecuted Female Healer", in Oldridge, ed., *The Witchcraft Reader*, 257; Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 140-41; Barbara Ehreneich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (pamphlet, Old Westbury), 1973.

[14] Verrier Elwin, "The Saora Woman as a Shaman", in *The Religion of Indian Tribe* (Bombay: Oxford U. P., 1955), 171.

[15] Bosu Mullick, "Gender Relations and Witches".

[16] D. N. Majumdar, "Disease, Death, and Divination in Certain Primitive Societies in India", *Man in India*, 13.2 (April-September, 1933), 136.

[17] P. C. Roy Chaudhury, *Gazetteer of India: Bihar, Palamau* (Patna: Superintendent, Secretariat Press, 1961), 16.

ones who could communicate with evil spirits and become their votaries. Most societies sought to recognise the difference between fertile and infertile groups − women who could multiply and thus add to the strength of the tribe, and women who, being infertile, served no very useful purpose to the community and therefore were believed to be prone to anti-social activities.[18] In some cases however, young and comely girls 'quite unlike the ancient hag of western fancy' also became victims of witch hunts.[19]

Witchcraft played an important role in the ordering of social relations. The Santal guru Kolean had told Skrefsrud, a Norwegian missionary: "Witchcraft is the great trouble with us Santals. Because of witchcraft, people in the village become enemies, doors of relatives is shut, father and sons quarrel, brothers are separated, husband and wife are divorced and in the country people kill each other".[20] "An accusation of witchcraft was enough to break a match", wrote the German Jesuit missionary Hoffman.[21] A husband could divorce a wife if she possessed an 'evil eye' (*najar*) or was a witch (*dain*) or if she brought sickness, misfortune, or ill-luck to his family.[22] The family of a person convicted of witchcraft was looked down upon the villagers and it was impossible for the grown up children of such a family to find a spouse.[23]

Witchcraft, Violence and the Socio-cultural Milieu

Were witch hunts and accompanying violence integral to the socio-cultural fabric of the Adivasis? Though the constructions of witchcraft changed over a period of time, what remained mostly constant was the belief in the maleficent magic of the witches and their intention to harm human beings, cattle and crops. For some, it was therefore justifiable to and kill the witches; it was their duty to protect the society from malign supernatural forces. Violence was an integral part of such hunts though its nature and structure kept changing. Wilkinson had noted that while there was remedy for angry *bongas* and ancestor spirits who could be appeased by sacrifices − first of fowls, then goats, and if these two didn't work then bullocks and buffalos − there was none for the witches who had to be *removed* (emphasis added).[24] Man writes: "[N]o reasoning with them, nor ridicule can dissuade them [Santals] of their belief in witches, and of the necessity of their being *at once murdered*" (emphasis added).[25] In some cases, the suspect was tortured till s/he succumbed to death.

Violence could also be invoked against close members of the family. In one case of the mid-19th century it was recorded that four women, including the sister, two nieces, and a nephew's wife of a man named Binaud said they could cure his eldest son who was ill. They gave his son a pill, but he died. Binund then ordered the four women to carry the dead body on a cot and followed them with a naked sword in his hand. When they reached the place where the bodies were disposed of, he killed all four women and then surrendered to the police. He was given

[18] Majumdar, "Disease, Death, and Divination", 137.

[19] F. B. Bradley-Birt, *History and Ethnology of an Indian Upland* (Delhi: Mittal Publications: 1990 [1909]), 222. Also see, Rev. John Hoffman, "Arthur Van Emelen and Other Jesuit Missionaries", *Encyclopedia Mundarica*, Vol. 10 (Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1990 [1950]), 2919-20.

[20] Paul Olaf Bodding, *Horkoren Mare Hapramko Reak Katha: The Traditions and Institutions of the Santals* (Delhi: Bahumukhi Prakashan, 1994 [1887]), 160. Henceforth *Reak Katha*. The first version of this Santal text was prepared by L. O. Skrefsrud in 1871 and was based on Skrefsrud's interactions with an old Santal guru Kolean.

[21] Ibid., 2916.

[22] S. C. Roy, *Oraon Religion and Customs* (Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1985 [1928]), 171.

[23] *Encyclopedia Mundarica*, Vol. 10, 2921.

[24] P. C. Roy Chaudhury, *Singhbum Old Records* (Patna: Revenue Department, Gazetteer's Revision Section, 1958), 271.

[25] Man, *Sonthalia and the Sonthals*, 29-30.

capital sentence. When examined, Binund and the witnesses described the four women as *real witches*, and the impression seems that they were *rightly served* (emphasis added).[26] Even in recent times we come across cases, where people have voluntarily confessed to killing those accused of witchcraft. On August 8 1998, Shyam Charan Mardi (a resident of Kashibera village of Dumaria police station near Ghatshila in East Singhbhum) beheaded Dooly Mardi for allegedly practicing witchcraft, took her severed head in his knapsack and hung it from a tree near his house. The next day, he went to the police station and surrendered.[27]

Having said this, one needs to put the phenomenon of witch hunts in a broader cultural perspective. Three things are important here. First, it was not as if all Adivasis were ever supportive of witch hunts. Second, witch hunts were common among Adivasis but not exclusively confined to them. Third, there were many other agents and actors who played in a role in the making of the witch and constructions of witchcraft from time to time.

Witch killings or hunts should never be looked upon as some kind of a universal response on the part of all Adivasis. There were many who did not support the idea, but were critical of it or opposed it. E. G. Man in *Sonthalia and the Sonthals* (1867) discusses several cases[28] in which husbands and parents requested the British assistant commissioner to intervene in the community witch trials. Similarly in Chotrae Deshmanjhi's account of the Santal *hul*, one comes across cases where some Santals are concerned over their wives or daughters being potentially targeted as witches. According to one such testimony: "We all were afraid seeing such things. My brothers suggested that we should leave the place immediately because we too have women and girls. They might be identified as 'witches'".[29] Sometimes the resistance to witchcraft accusations could take an extreme shape. In an incident reported to the police in 1880s, a man killed another with a sword while the latter was asleep because he had accused former's wife of practicing witchcraft.[30] Such instances were however rare and intermittent and mostly individual initiatives. A more systematic and organised critique of witch hunts emerges in the form of the Adivasi movements in the late-19th and early 20th centuries, which generally combined elements of socio-religious reform with political and agrarian issues.

Were the Adivasis solely responsible for the development of the occult and the production of accompanying violence? The available evidence does not seem to suggest so. Witch hunts were common to the Adivasis, but never exclusively confined to them. A report by Major Roughsedge written in 1818 describes an account of a Brahmin woman who was denounced and tried as a witch. Having escaped the ordeal by water, she was pronounced to be a witch, and deprived of her nose.[31] A *fatwah* issued in 1860 from the office of the (Acting) Law Officer of the Sadar Court, Calcutta not only banned witchcraft among Muslims, but also made some attempt at defining the legalities and complications concerning witchcraft.

[26] E. T. Dalton, "Trial of Queen versus Binund", *Report on the Police of the Chota Nagpore Division for the Year 1865* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Office, 1866), 44.

[27] Archana Mishra, *Casting the Evil Eye: Witch Trials in Tribal India* (Delhi: Roli Books, 2003), 68.

[28] Man, *Sonthalia and the Sonthals*, 152-53.

[29] Dhirendranath Baske, "Chotrae Deshmanjhi Reak Katha", *Bortica*, January-June, 2005, 13.

[30] J. C. Veasey, *Report on the Police of the Lower Provinces of Bengal Presidency for the Year 1884* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1885), 56.

[31] E. T. Dalton, *Tribal History of Eastern India* [1872] (Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1973), 200.

The Making of a Witch

The period between the late-19th and early-20th centuries was a defining moment in the history of witchcraft and witch hunting as these became linked to the colonial administration's effort to extend its political and juridical domain in the Adivasi heartland, the missionary zeal to convert the populace, and the ethnographers' and anthropologists' ardour to position the Adivasis in the evolutionary scale. This in turn resulted in compilation and documentation of literature and folklore related to witchcraft by the administrators, ethnographers, and missionaries. The literature produced was frequently circulated/reproduced in gazetteers, administrative reports and official literature. Representations of Adivasis as 'primitive' therefore went hand-in-hand with the organisation of scattered beliefs and practices related to witchcraft.

The emergence of ethnology as the 'most scientific framework' for the study of the linguistic, physical, and cultural characteristics of dark skinned, non-European, and 'uncivilised' people along with the development of Social Darwinism, wherein the dark skinned people were assigned their 'proper place' in the evolutionary scale, influenced many administrators, missionaries, gentlemen explorers, and scientific travellers in India.[32] Evolutionary racial ideas dominated the works of Hunter, Herbert H. Risley and J. Forsyth and their classifications on caste and tribe.[33] Most often than not, such classifications tended to primitivise the Adivasis in relation to religion (animism). Further, this primitivism was often emphasised in relation to the 'higher' Hindu castes or people of 'higher culture'. The treatment of 'animism' as a separate system of faith in the census operations helped create a new sense of hierarchy in the early decades of the 20th century by institutionalising the 'primitive' as 'animist' (1901 Census) or as following a different form of religion (1911 census). This neo-primitivism was emphasised in several contemporary ethnographical literature. For C. H. Bompas, the religion of the Santals was 'animistic', characterised by omnipresence of spirits who were propitiated by elaborate ceremonies and sacrifices generally terminating in dances and ceremonial drinking of rice beer.[34] Likewise, Thurston's multi-volume *Ethnographic Notes* dealt with several themes including marriage customs, idolatrous cults, sacrifices, hook swinging rituals, witchcraft, *mantras* (spells), earth eating, and other exotica. He tried to link the practices of the Adivasis with those of the Hindus and exaggerated their idiosyncrasies as evidence of supposed primitivism.[35] The beginning of the 20th century saw the emergence of professional anthropology in India. However, works of pioneers like S. C. Roy, D.N. Majumdar, Charulal Mukherjee etc. continued to be informed by prevailing notions of hierarchy reinforced by race, caste, and religion. Describing the Mundas and Oraons in racial terms, S. C. Roy wrote: "[T]he religion of the Chota-Nagpur tribes was a crude system of spiritism or animism ... and a strong belief in 'magic' and witchcraft was common to all tribes".[36]

[32] Vinita Damodaran, "Colonial Constructions of the 'Tribe' in India: The Case of Chotanagpur", *The Indian Historical Review*, 33.1 (January 2006), 48-50.

[33] Ibid., 48-49.

[34] Cecil Henry Bompas, *Folklore of the Santal Parganas* [1909] (Delhi: Ajay Book Service, 1981), 5.

[35] Bhangya Bhukya, "The Mapping of the Adivasi Social: Colonial Anthropology and Adivasis", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43.39 (27 September 2008), 106.

[36] S. C. Roy, "The Effects on the Aborigines of Chotanagpur of their Contact with Western Civilisation", *Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, 17.4 (1931), 359.

The documentation and compilation of folklore concerning witchcraft by missionaries, ethnographers and anthropologists helped organise hitherto scattered beliefs and gave somewhat formal definitions to certain occult practices. It is important to note that such works contained detailed information on religion, *bonga* worship, witchcraft, exorcism rituals, and sacrifices. The circulation and dissemination of such material, often in indigenous languages, played an important role in circulation of the folklore related to witchcraft thereby making the missionaries unconscious catalysts. All these were conducive to the process of institutionalisation of the belief, the manifestations of which included construction and proliferation of several accounts and stories about spirits and witches around the early 20th century. Accounts by Archer, Bompas, S. C. Roy, Bodding, etc. carry detailed and illustrated descriptions on the secret gatherings of witches, collectivity of witchcraft, initiation and training ceremonies, ritualisation of the craft, etc.

How did the belief in witchcraft acquire substance and prominence? The development of witchcraft as an institutionalised set of beliefs was a prolonged and complex process arising out of a conjunction of a variety of factors in the colonial period. Ideas related to witchcraft were in circulation in the pre-colonial period as well. Such ideas started acquiring new meanings and constructs under the impact of tensions and uncertainties generated under colonialism. There was a widely held notion among the local communities that increasing occurrence of diseases, social disorders, deforestation and famines were the work of 'malevolent' forces. Such ideas had a particularly strong appeal in the context of growing pressures on the tribal economy.[37] Increasing occurrences of diseases polarised gender relations in Adivasi societies and witches (mostly women) came to be looked upon as agents sowing the 'seeds of sicknesses'. Bodding records: "There is no genuine Santal who does not believe in witches. This being so, it is not strange that a suspicion is always present that witches may be at work when people fall ill and do not recover".[38] Marine Carrin Bouez points out that the association of malevolent *bongas* with particular women was the immediate reason for the targeting of such possessed women. As disease, disorder, and famine became endemic in the second half of the 19th century, so did witch hunting. Women witches in such representations wandered at night sowing the germs of disease in front of doors, and while protective deities were constantly invoked to protect from the evil eye.[39] Diseases − particularly the epidemics resulting in multiple deaths − came to acquire new constructions and causal agents. A disease like cholera regularly known as *hawa dukh* (literally 'air affliction' – also indicating the origin of the disease) was now seen as being implanted by witches.[40]

Instances like barrenness, outbreak of diseases, epidemics, crop failures and deaths provided the social occasioning and pretext for carrying out witch hunts and gave the act a social legitimacy. When cholera broke out in Birhankitta village in Santal Parganas, a little girl Pania Soren and Jeona Murmu, a woman related to her, were taken to the *manjithan* (a place which serves as the memorial of the first

[37] Vinita Damodaran, "Gender Forests and Famine in 19th-Century Chotanagpur India", *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 9.2 (2002), 147-49.

[38] P. O. Bodding, *Studies in Santal Medicine and Connected Folklore* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1986 [1925]), 38.

[39] Ibid., 148.

[40] Ibid., 64-66, 113.

founder of the village) and killed. The choice of *manjithan* as a place for the kill was to "enlist the support of the village's founder to stop the disease".[41] In another case, Achi Kisku was killed by her two brothers because the son of one of them had caught small pox.[42] By ritualising such acts in the name of 'unhappy' spirits, witch-killing incidents were invested with a religious dimension.

Things became more complicated when the colonial administration imposed a ban on witch killings. The administrative and legal ban together with a systematic negation of witchcraft by colonial administrators (and Christian missionaries) was met with strong resistance. After their conquest of India, the British sought to outlaw persecution of witches – a practice seen as barbaric. In 1853, a ruling by the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal equated witch killing with 'murder' punishable by death. It stated that "no plea of savage ignorance or barbarous custom should be permitted to stay the full execution of the law upon those who are found guilty of taking human life".[43] This happened not only in Chotanagpur (1853), but in other regions in western and north-western India such as the Dangs (1847) and Rajputana (1853).[44] What was unique about the new ruling was that witch killing was invested with criminality and equated with 'murder' punishable by death.

David Hardiman asserts that colonial administrators failed to acknowledge the degree to which the notion of witchcraft was socially embedded and universally believed in as matter of common sense.[45] One comes across some interesting similarities in the ways Adivasis in different regions reacted to the new ruling. Skaria points out that most Adivasis in the Dangs region responded to the ban with hostility and resistance.[46] The general sympathy for witch killers led to attempts by ordinary Bhils, their chiefs, and even local Rajput power-holders, to conceal killings from the British.[47] The result was that "the practice was driven underground rather than suppressed ... local holders of power took action against witches because they were convinced that they had a *duty to preserve their society from malign supernatural forces*"(emphasis added).[48]

The ban was also resisted by the Adivasis of Chotanagpur. It led to the building of a counter, subversive discourse that sought to otherise and ridicule the administrators for failing to appreciate the power of the witches.

> The witches eat us and when we catch them and worry them just a little, the magistrates again turn the matter round and resort to imprisonment; we feel great distress; what can we possibly do, so that it might go well with us; we are utterly bewildered. Also when we explain it to magistrates they do not believe it; they say: Well then let her eat my finger, then only shall I believe she is a witch – and then they jail you. The witches do not eat using a vessel and a knife, quite so; by sorcery they send people off to the other world straightaway.[49]

Some sections of Adivasis believed that witches were flourishing under the *benevolent power* of the British was increasingly gaining ground and that the breakdown of the traditional village administration (under the British rule) had

[41] S. M. Naqavi, "Santal Murders", *Man in India*, 23.3 (1943), 242.

[42] Ibid., 244.

[43] Anindita Mukhopadhyay, *Behind the Mask: The Cultural Definition of the Legal Subject in Colonial Bengal, 1775-1811* (Delhi: Oxford U. P., 2006), 47.

[44] Skaria, "Women, Witchcraft and Gratuitous Violence", 135.

[45] David Hardiman, "Knowledge of the Bhils and their Systems of Healing", *The Indian Historical Review*, 33.1 (January 2006), 219.

[46] Skaria, "Women, Witchcraft and Gratuitous Violence", 138.

[47] Ibid., 138.

[48] Hardiman, "Knowledge of the Bhils", 220.

[49] *Reak Katha*, 160.

only aided the process.

> Formerly the village headmen and his deputy were subduing them, and if they would not be peaceful, they would together with the village people, drive them away from the village after having disgraced them; but nowadays the magistrates have made them utterly audacious so that we men have become absolutely disheartened.[50]

[50] Ibid.

Whenever the hold of the colonial administration on law and order loosened – as during the Santal *hul* and 1857 Rebellion – the ban on witch killing was systematically flouted and the region experienced perhaps the first mass witch hunts.[51] According to Dalton, the Commissioner of Chotanagpur during the Rebellion: "[A] terrible raid was made against all, who for years had been suspected of dealings with the evil one, and most atrocious murders were committed. Young men were told off for the duty by the elders; neither sex nor age was spared".[52] Sopaee, one of those convicted of witch killing in the district of Singbhum during the Rebellion later testified:

[51] For details see Shashank S. Sinha, "Witch-hunts, Adivasis, and the Uprising in Chota Nagpur", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42.19 (May 12, 2007), 1672-76.

[52] Dalton, *Tribal History*, 199.

> It was just that we should be punished, but it is nearly three years since these murders were committed. The Bur peer was then in a disturbed state, and in all the village [not just his own] *it was arranged that all accused of witchcraft should be murdered* (emphasis added).[53]

[53] Examination of Sopaee; Government of Bengal Judicial Proceedings, N. 59 (August 5, 1859), West Bengal State Archives.

The development of notion of private property under the colonial rule also added new dimensions to witch hunting. It had important repercussions for women, particularly those in possession of any piece of land. Under customary laws, Adivasi women could not own land. Only as single women – widows or unmarried daughters – they were entitled to some flexible and informal rights in land. Broadly speaking, they enjoyed two kinds of rights: first, a life interest in land – a right to manage the land and its produce and second, right to a share of produce of the land – the right to maintenance. Though the Permanent Settlement (1793) introduced the concept of private property in land, it was the survey and settlement operations carried out in Chotanagpur during late-19th and early 20th centuries which institutionalised the nature and titling of holdings. By reinforcing the patriarchal principle in inheritance whereby only males could become formal and legal owners of land, these operations contributed significantly to the destruction of residual rights of women and creation of exclusionary land systems. Women holding land rights could now become targets. In the event of the death of such women, land accrued to male agnates of the deceased. Incidents of women holding land being labelled as witches and hounded out, occasionally killed were connected to the politics of land ownership. In most cases, the killers were related to victims.

The relationship between Christian missionaries and witch hunts in the Adivasi

heartland was complicated and complex. Both Catholics and Protestants were united in their highly normative and intolerant attitude towards divided allegiance. Accepting Christian theology therefore meant complete rejection of the so-called *Sarna* religion and *bonga* worship. 'Freedom from witches' became one of the major incentives of joining Christianity.[54] The Oraon converts, says Dalton, believed that: "the Supreme Being who does not protect them from the spite of malevolent spirits, has ... Christians under His special care [and] in consequence of this guardianship, the witches and *bhuts* have no power over Christians, and it is, therefore, good for them to join that body".[55] Roy argues that Christianity not only satisfied their emotional need of communion with a personal deity but the Christian dualistic doctrine of the 'Spirit of Good' and 'Spirit of Evil' − God, and good Angels on the one hand, and the Devil and his evil hosts on the other − fitted in with the Oraon conception of *Dharmes*, the 'Spirit of Good' on one hand, and the malignant spirits, 'evil eye' and 'evil mouth' on the other.[56] The missionaries used various media, like talks, dramas, preaching or play, to ridicule witchcraft.[57] In addition, they established a network of schools and hospitals to counter the belief in witchcraft and *bongas*.

[54] Keshari N. Sahay, *Under the Shadow of the Cross* (Calcutta: Institute of Social Research and Applied Anthropology, 1976), 64.

[55] Ibid., 257.

[56] Roy, *Oraon Religion,* 338.

[57] Sachchidananda, "Cultural Change in Tribal Bihar: Mundas and Oraons", *Bulletin of the Bihar Tribal Research Institute* (July, 1960), 72-73.

Though the missionaries, particularly the Protestants, wanted converts to sever all ties with *Sarna* religion and native customs, conversion to Christianity was never permanent or complete. The missions' proposal of a sudden and complete break with indigenous religion and customs was never entirely successful and the converts, more often than not, kept vacillating between Sarna religion and Christianity. The missions thus shared a fragile, often ambiguous, relationship with their converts on issues like *bonga* worship and belief in witchcraft. On the one hand, the missions strongly condemned such practices, on the other, the converts often were sympathetic to or sometimes participated in such practices or rituals. K.N Sahay points to some incidents which bring out the strains in this uneasy relationship. In 1954, all Lutherans of Lotakona were expelled from the congregation by the Church for believing in witchcraft and indulging in magical conjuring. In another very serious case in 1958, a Catholic woman reputed to be witch was burnt to death by eight or nine Catholics including a young catechist in Sikri Ambatoli village. All accused were arrested and charged with murder.[58] A survey of Shefali and Jaipur in 1950s revealed that around 83 per cent of the Catholics of Shefali and 93 per cent of the Lutherans (Oraon converts) of Jaipur believed in witchcraft and sorcery.[59] There are several cases of witch hunting among the Christianised Adivasis even today.

[58] Sahay, *Under the Shadow of the Cross.*

[59] Ibid.

Unlike Christianity, Hinduism, did not have such an organised presence in the region at least during the colonial period. It had however made its impact over a long period of time. K. N. Sahay discusses several sources of Hindu influence among the Adivasis. This included chieftains claiming genealogical affinities with legendary Hindu kings; construction of Hindu shrines and celebration of Hindu festivals; influence of Vaishnavism; presence of Hinduised *rajas*, landlords and

Hindu officials and rent collectors; employment by *rajas* of Brahmin priests and Hindu retainers; reform movements like the Tana Bhagats; and to a lesser extent, some Hindu missionaries.[60] The opening of mines, extension of cultivation and new employment opportunities led to further and greater influx of Hindus in the region between the late 19th and early-20th centuries. Cultural interactions with Hindus and Hinduism over a long period of time had created particularly complex religions affiliations, a situation which created tremendous complications and confusions for the census officials. To Baines, the entire exercise of drawing a line between the tribal people who were Hinduised and those who followed the tribal form of religion was futile.[61]

[60] K. N. Sahay, "The Transformation Scene in Chotanagpur: Hindu Impact on the Tribals", in P. Dash Sharma, ed., *The Passing Scene in Chotanagpur* (Ranchi: Maitrayee Publications, 1980), 25-71.

[61] J. A. Baines, *Census of India*, *1891*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office), 1893.

The process of Hinduisation in the region went beyond the adoption of vegetarian food, sacred thread, and purity and pollution norms. Such a process also had a strong hegemonic content leading to a reorientation of Adivasi religious and social order and substantially influenced their dealings with the world of spirits and witches. It played a very important role in the ritualisation of witch trials. Accounts from around mid-19th century talk about various kinds of ordeals, oracles and divination associated with witch trials. While these continued to influence the detection and identification of witches in some cases, what distinguishes witch hunts in the late-19th/early-20th century was the emergence of professional/trained witch doctors (*ojhas*) along with their tutelary spirits (*saket bongas*); elaborate and ritualised exorcism processes underlined by a marked preponderance of sacrifices, accommodation of *mantars* (incantations), *jharnis* (magical formulae which could be sung) and invocations composed mostly in Hindi or sometimes in Bengali and Oriya; and, systematic inclusion of many gods and goddesses associated with Brahmanical Hinduism.[62] This reflected a subtle, nevertheless progressive Hinduisation of the Adivasis. Brahmanical Hinduism also reinforced the traditional gender and patriarchal tensions by reinforcing the figure of a female witch − a point underlined in almost all invocations and adjuration connected with the exorcism of spirits and witches.

[62] See S. C. Roy, *The Mundas*; S. C. Roy, *Oraon Religion*; Hoffman, *Encyclopedia Mundarica*; P. O. Bodding, *Studies in Santal Medicine*; D. N. Majumdar, *A Tribe in Transition: A Study in Cultural Pattern* (London: Longman's Green and Co. Ltd, 1937); Charulal Mukherjea, *The Santals* [1940] (Calcutta: A Mukherjee and Co. Pvt. Ltd., 1962).

This rise of the exorcism process and complex witch trials was also accompanied with the ascendancy of the witch doctors, known locally as *ojhas, matis, sokha, janguru* etc. Speaking in the case of Munda, Hoffman says that the witch doctors or *sokhas* neither belonged to the Mundari village, nor even to the Munda race and the language they used was mostly *Sadani* or Hindi hardly understood by the Mundas using the *mantars*. Further, they derived their powers not from *Singa bonga* (the Adivasi deity) but from Mahadeo, a Hindu deity.[63] This was true of the other sections of Adivasis as well. Spirits or *bhuts* were mostly driven out by Hindu *matis/ ojhas* or in few cases by Adivasi *matis/ojhas* trained by Hindu *gurus* through *mantars*, *jharnis*, and invocations composed mostly in Hindi (in some cases Bengali and Oriya), and dedicated to Hindu gods. Roy also stresses that Kharia's original conception of witch would appear to have been that of a woman endowed by nature with the evil eye. A *genuine witch was born and not made*. The

[63] Bosu Mullick, "Gender Relations and Witches", 125-26.

developed art and training in that art appears to have been introduced generally by the low-class Hindu practitioners.[64]

[64] Ibid., 412.

Complex rituals, sacrifices and processes associated with the exorcism process and witch trials not only benefited the *ojhas* but also other related parties − the village headman, the deputy headman, as well as the villagers. This is shown in the distribution of spoils, both the fee and sacrificial meat, offered after the patient had recovered (*saket*). Bodding shows how the *ojha* shared the fee (*dadni*) offered to him with the village headman and how a large part of the sacrificial meat was shared between the *ojha*, village headman, the householder and the available villagers together with rice beer.[65] The communal feast was a much welcome break for the poverty stricken villagers. There were other claimants too. Hoffman records: "I have several times been told that they [witch persecutors] even bribe the local native police to take no notice of complaints made by the persecuted family. A native sub-inspector of police avowed to me that people were in habit of coming to ask his leave to go to the *sokha*".[66] The *ojha*-village headman nexus still plays an important role in the economies of witch hunts. Sometimes influential villagers and even close relatives bribe the *ojhas* and village headman to have a woman declared a witch and usurp her property. The lucky few sometimes escape with a reprimand and a fine. They are however forced to partly/fully bear the cost of the 'purificatory' sacrifice as also finance the communal feast that follows.[67]

[65] Bodding, *Studies in Santal Medicine*, 29.

[66] Hoffman, *Encyclopedia Mundarica,* Vol. 5, 2921.

[67] Mishra, *Casting the Evil Eye*, 43-44.

Another complex dimension in the politics surrounding witchcraft could be seen in the relationship between the Adivasi movements and witch hunting. Most movements denounced spirits and witches. It is however interesting to note how the leaders of the various movements used the language, imagery, and symbolism associated with that world. Their engagements with spirits and witches should not be just seen as simplistic reflections of a negative consciousness or a pristine desire for reform. They demonstrate how the politics of the supernatural could acquire complex meanings at times, sometimes anti-colonial, sometimes sectarian, and sometimes patriarchal, depending on the trajectory of the movement and leadership.

One sees visible manifestations of the politics surrounding witch killing during the Tana Bhagat movement. Many of the denunciations of women as witches occurred in the course of spirit-driving operations.[68] Those who did not comply with the regulations of the Tana faith were forbidden the use of public wells and their wives were declared witches and their fowls and pigs killed.[69] Sometimes violence would go beyond the death of the victim as could be observed in the following episode from the Tana Bhagat movement:

[68] Sangeeta Dasgupta, "Reordering a World: The Tana Bhagat Movement, 1914-1919", *Studies in History*, 15.1 (1999), 28, 34.

[69] Ibid., 34.

> A meeting of Uraons (Oraons) was in progress at which mantras were being recited and considerable excitement prevailed. The deceased who had been previously been charged with practicing witchcraft was beaten to death in her house in the presence of her husband. The culprits, when they joined the

assembly were seen to be carrying pieces of the women's brain which they licked from time to time.[70]

[70] Government of Bihar and Orissa, Political Department (Police), Special Section, File no P3-R/14 of 1916 (Patna: Bihar State Archives), 12.

The Return of Witch Hunting

The mature period in the history of witch hunting in Chotanagpur (late-19th to early twentieth 20th) was followed by a period of slowdown and decline. Police records and ethnographic and village studies show that there was a conspicuous decline in witch killings between 1930s and 1970s though belief in witchcraft continued to remain strong. Fines, beating and occasional killing largely formed the usual ways of dealing with the accused during this period.[71] One may not have like-to-like comparative figures but sufficient qualitative evidence and somewhat less-organized quantitative data to indicate such a trend. An analysis of Santal murders in the Santal Parganas between 1931-40 shows that of a total of 78 murders those resulting from witchcraft (16), and property disputes (12), formed the second and third highest category of offences respectively, next only to alcoholism (19), and that there was an element of overlap in such categories.[72] The analysis also throws significant light on gender dimensions of witch-hunt. In a total of 78 cases of Santal murders, the murderers were exclusively males, but more than half the victims were found to be women.[73] A quantitative analysis of murders among the Mundas and Oraons of Ranchi between 1955-59 likewise shows that 8 out of 107 murders were caused due to a belief in witchcraft, accounting for 7 per cent of the total.[74]

[71] For example see Sachchidananda, "Cultural Change in Tribal Bihar: Mundas and Oraons", *Bulletin of the Bihar Tribal Research Institute* (July, 1960); Hari Mohan, *The Chero: A Study in Acculturation* (Ranchi: The Bihar Tribal Welfare Research Institute, 1973); Anirudha Behari Saran, *Murder and Suicide among the Munda and the Oraon* (Delhi: National Publishing House, 1974).

[72] Naqavi, "Santal Murders", 243.

[73] Ibid., 238.

[74] Saran, *Murder and Suicide*, 70, 79.

Legislations, Christian missionaries, Adivasi reform movements (inspired by Hindu ideas of purity), the realisation by Adivasis that such practices were considered socially degrading by upper caste Hindus played a part alongside the emerging ethno-regionalism. The Adivasi Mahasabha (1938), and later the Jharkhand Party (1950) (with mainly Christianised Adivasis as followers), were trying to forge a pan-Adivasi collective which implied toning down internal tensions (including witch killings). The strains generated by the post-colonial developmental regime, however, led to a new wave of witch killings in 1970s-1980s onwards.

What went wrong in the following years? The mineral-rich Chotanagpur became one of the natural sites for the unfolding of a development regime in post-Independence India as the new nation-state embarked on a policy of industrialisation. Capitalism, state-sponsored and private, made a significant headway in the 'Ruhr of India'[75] as Chotanagpur played host to development of several mines, industries, and other multipurpose projects. Adivasi lands were also acquired for the construction of railway stations, schools, colleges, roads, dams, hydroelectric projects and thermal power stations.[76] This was done without a well thought-out rehabilitation or resettlement policy. The employment opportunities that came up at various projects were mostly cornered by the immigrants from

[75] The Chotanagpur region is known as called the 'Ruhr of India' on account of extreme concentration of various minerals like coal, iron ore, and mica as well limestone, clay, and manganese.

[76] L. P. Vidyarthi, *Socio-Economic Implications of Industrialisation in India: A Case Study of Tribal Bihar* (New Delhi: Planning Commission, 1970), 209.

neighbouring regions who frequented the region in search of employment opportunities. The phenomenon of dispossession took place both directly through deprivation of land and indirectly through denial of benefits of development.[77]

While some Adivasis benefitted from the expansion of mining and industrial sector as well as reservation of 'Scheduled Tribes' in central and state legislative assemblies and the public sector undertakings,[78] for most the new developments caused unprecedented displacement in a matter of a couple of decades. The region had long been struggling with problems of illiteracy, healthcare facilities and poverty. It also had a chronic history of witch hunts. In this context, a new spell of dispossession and deprivation contributed immensely to various kinds of uncertainties and tensions besides aggravating the existing ones. In this new climate, witch accusations and persecutions could acquire diverse meanings and serve various purposes. They could also legitimise and fuel a variety of motivations including superstition and belief; gender and social tensions; property disputes and land grabbing; power politics; sexual assaults etc. Land grabbing formed an important underlying motivation behind the new wave of witch killings and single and vulnerable women, particularly those with land rights, the natural and primary targets.

In 1982, Laru Jonko, an activist from Singhbhum, sent Mahasweta Devi a list of 37 persons killed on account of suspicion of witchcraft by the Hos in a short span of time. Most victims, she mentioned, were women and, in each case the design had been to grab the land of the lynched.[79] Sometimes land issues were intermeshed with other socio-economic issues, family disputes, squabbles, and other village tensions.

The violence related to witch hunts also became increasingly layered. After being branded a witch, Chutni Mahatani of Seraikela district was driven out of her home along with her three children. She was tortured by her relatives and neighbours and even forced to eat human excreta.[80] Over the years, this has emerged as a common mode of punishment. The layered character of violence becomes more visible in witch hunts reported in the recent times. In one such incident, Rukni (a widowed beggar), held responsible for the deterioration in the condition of Bandhan Mahto's daughter-in-law was dragged onto streets and thrashed; made to lick shoes, later made to drink human excreta and urine; and then taken to an *ojha*; and finally, locked up in a room for whole night and continuously beaten.[81] Sometimes larger power dynamics are at work. In one such incident, Pushnidevi Manjhi (living in Palani village near Ranchi) was accused of witchcraft by a powerful landlord of the village, Gahan Lal, when the latter's paddy caught fire. She was confined, beaten with bamboo sticks and metal rods, and her nails were pulled out. Later, police investigation revealed that there had been constant fights in the village over land and wages and Gahan Lal wanted to use this occasion to instill fear among the villagers and strengthen his control.[82] Also there in a perceptible increase in cases related to witchcraft accusations among the Dalits

[77] Mathew Areeparampil, "Industries, Mines and Dispossession", in Walter Fernandes and Enakshi Ganguly Thukral, eds., *Development, Displacement and Rehabilitation* (Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1989), 19.

[78] Stuart Corbridge, "Ousting Singbonga: The Struggle for India's Jharkhand", in Peter Robb, ed., *Dalit Movement and the Meanings of Labour in India* (Delhi: Oxford U.P., 1999), 136.

[79] Maitreya Ghatak, ed., *Dust on the Road: The Activist Writings of Mahasweta Devi* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1997), 168.

[80] *The Telegraph* (Calcutta, June 23, 2012).

[81] *Prabhat Khabar*, (Ranchi, December 26, 1998).

[82] Rama Lakshmi, *The Washington Post* (August 08, 2005).

and Muslims. Since the last couple of decades, sexual assaults have become common, the emphasis being on public humiliation. In September 2000, two Adivasi women from Pordha and Haripuri villages in Ranchi district were branded as witches and paraded naked with heads shaven. One of them, a childless widow, owned half an acre of land. The other charged her attackers with rape and accused her husband of plotting the attack. She had apparently tried to dissuade her husband from selling off the piece of land.[83]

[83] T. K. Rajalakshmi, "In the Name of a Witch", *Frontline*, 17.23 (November 11-24, 2000).

Understanding Violence Surrounding Witch Hunts

One requires a careful understanding of violence associated with witch hunts. Witch hunts form one-of-the-least talked about acts of violence in India and have never been duly examined or studied. One of the first to present a serious historical assessment of the subject is Ajay Skaria. He argues that the violence of the witches was 'gratuitous' − anti-social and independent of social causality.[84] The profoundly gendered nature of this violence, he says, was related to the ambiguous position of women in 19th century Adivasi society.[85] Further, the mystical aggression of the *dakans* was seen as following trajectories determined by social relationships.[86]

[84] Skaria, "Women, Witchcraft and Gratuitous Violence", 111.

[85] Ibid., 131-32.

[86] Ibid., 119.

Some scholars have used the expression 'ritualised'[87] or 'sanctioned'[88] in general to describe or refer to witch hunts, although they do adequately explain the use of such terms. Others have studied such violence under the loose rubric of 'violence of normal times' or 'lived realities'[89] Vinita Damodaran links the rise in witch-hunting since the latter half of the 19th century to the 'pressures of rapid ecological changes combined with the erosion of common property rights and deforestation.'[90] Nathan and Kelkar have argued that categorisation of women and men as witches and witch finders respectively was an essential part of the process of establishing the authority of men. Alongside, witch hunts also represented specific attack on women's land rights.[91] Samar Bosu Mullick investigates myths and legends connected to witchcraft to argue that the targeting of women only formed an external manifestation of a deep-rooted gender struggle as patriarchy in the dominant Hindu society influenced indigenous cultures.[92]

[87] Damodaran, "Gender Forests and Famine", 133-63.

[88] Roy, "Sanctioned Violence", 136-47.

[89] Dev Nathan and Govind Kelkar, "Women as Witches and Keepers of Demons: Changing Gender Relations in Adivasi Communities", in Kalpana Kannabiran, ed., *The Violence of Normal Times: Essays on Women's Lived Realities* (Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2003), 67-82.

[90] Damodaran, "Gender, Forests and Famine", 147.

[91] Nathan and Kelkar, "Women as Witches", 73-76.

[92] Bosu Mullick, "Gender Relations and Witches", 333-58.

The emphasis in such attributions is on causality of violence and the gendered nature of victimhood. While they do somewhat highlight how such acts enjoyed some kind of a sanction from the community or religion, they do not say much about the structure of such violence and its dynamic nature. From killing around the mid-19 century to fines, dispossession, banishment or killing in the early 20 century, to fines, beating and occasional killing around mid-20th century − violence related to witch hunts have undergone changes over a period of time. They have acquired dramatic new forms in the last couple of decades under the influence of globalisation and caste societies.

In this article, I do not wish to theorise the violence arising or accruing from

cases related to witch hunting. I do however wish to briefly indicate its attributes and complex nature. In general, witch hunts have a tendency to intensify, complicate and acquire a layered character. As we have seen in the preceding discussion, punishments for practicing witchcraft, either in the colonial past or today, mostly combined two or more elements − beating, expulsion, fine, killing, head tonsuring, dispossession, verbal abuse, social boycott etc. The violence accompanying such cases always followed the pattern of going from 'bad' to 'worse' − at least in the perception of the perpetrators – if the suspect was/is not killed immediately. In the first instance, the 'witch' was/is fined, asked to behave, and otherwise threatened. In case there was/is a reoccurrence of deaths, diseases or mishaps in the village, the accused would be thrashed, driven out, forced to swallow urine and human faeces, drink raw blood of a chicken or killed. All or some of these may happen in one stretch or in succession, though not necessarily in that order.

Meanings and nature of witch hunts have continuously changed in the past. However, they have changed radically in the last couple of decades. One could underline some profound changes. First, though women have been killed or harassed over the question of land, the connections between land grabbing and witchcraft accusations are more visible and apparent now than ever in the past. Second, the site and territoriality of witch hunts have changed − they are no longer a phenomenon internal to a tribe, but have become village affairs. Previously the accuser and accused formed a part of the same tribe or community. However, a number of those accused and punished on account of suspicion of witchcraft now include Dalits and Muslims. Third, there has been a perceptible increase in violence both against and within the Adivasi and marginalised communities. Finally, sexual assaults on the accused are fast emerging as new dynamics in witch hunts. There has been a conspicuous sexualisation of violence, which hitherto had been a practice mostly encountered in caste societies. The idea of publically humiliating/shaming the accused and denigrating their sexuality is increasingly taking the form of a spectacle. Such public trials are indicative of the trend towards formation of new collectivities of violence in the 'Adivasi heartland' − a collectivity which momentarily diffuses the ethnic and social boundaries existing in the village to give witch hunts an extended public character. The participation of the Adivasis alongside other castes and communities often makes such incidents a larger village affair. Any attempt to deal with the phenomenon of witch hunting should not only take into account the dynamic and layered nature of such violence but should adopt a more inclusive approach not necessarily limited to Adivasi communities.

Peter B. Andersen

Interpreting the Santal Rebellion. From 1855 till the End of the Nineteenth Century

Abstract: Postcolonial studies have interpreted the Santal Rebellion, the *hul* of 1855, as a peasant rebellion that the colonial power construed as an ethnic rebellion (R. Guha). Anthropologists and historians have stressed the near-complete mobilisation of the Santals, whereas a later colonial historian (W. W. Hunter), who opposed the exploitation of the Santals by the East India Company, regarded the rebellion as a peaceful demonstration gone astray. This article argues that the rebellion was a socially and religiously motivated rebellion against the East India Company and that its leaders sought unsuccessfully to mobilise Hindu landlords to join the rebellion, as documented in their letters. The reinterpretation of the objects and events that went astray dates to the court case and conviction of one of the leaders after the rebellion was lost, yet his defence was carried much further by a colonial historian (Hunter). The mobilisation of the Santals and the later religious reinterpretation of the lost rebellion are investigated from archives and contemporary Santal eyewitnesses who described the horror of the events.

Keywords: *hul*, *peasant insurgency*, *tribal insurgency*, *Santal rebellion*

Postcolonial studies have tended to offer sweeping conclusions that colonial history is a simple product of the colonial situation,[1] thereby glossing over historical details that they dislike from the perspective of present-day morality[2] or projecting their own ideologies onto the study of the past. For this article, a relevant case is Ranajit Guha's seminal work on *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983). Here, Guha presents the Santals during the Santal Rebellion of 1855-1856 as peasants participating in a peasant rebellion rather than as isolated tribespeople who could mobilise alliances neither with other tribes, nor with Bengali peasants in the areas of the rebellion.[3] This article argues against Guha by engaging with his study of peasant insurgency as well as with other aspects of his discursive method, including his 'prose of counter-insurgency' – that is to say, the language of government and its suppression of insurgencies in late-colonial South Asia.[4]

It may be relevant to introduce the background to the Santal Rebellion, the *hul* of 1855-56, before turning to our central argument. The Santal Rebellion broke out during the rainy season of 1855 in the core of the Damin-i-Koh, an area just south of the Ganges, which had recently been settled by Santal agriculturalists. There is evidence of a steep rise in the East India Company's (EIC) earnings in the area in the period leading up to the rebellion. When two Santal brothers Sidu and Kanhu, living in a village in the core of the Damin-i-Koh, began receiving messages from the god Thakur that he would help them expel the unjust Europeans and

[1] The critique of Ranajit Guha and post-modern positions forwarded in this paper is in continuation of other debates where the author has been part of arguing for the continuation of the use of the concept of tribe in the Indian context (Peter B. Andersen et al., eds., *From Fire Rain to Rebellion: Reasserting Ethnic Identity through Narrative* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2011), and has been critical towards the utilisation of the concept of discourse (Peter Andersen and Susanne Foss, "Christian Missionaries and Orientalist Discourse: Illustrated by Materials on the Santals after 1855", in Robert Eric Frykenberg, ed., *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company and London: Routledge Curzon, 2003, 295-314). Parts of the historical analysis of the Santal Rebellion of 1855 published in this article has also been forwarded in P. B. Andersen "Rituel legitimering af santaloprøret", in Tim Jensen and Mikael Rothstein, eds., *Den sammenklappelige Tid: Festskrift til Jørgen Podemann Sørensen* (København: Forlaget Chaos, 2011), 129-139. Besides Ranajit Guha's eminent analysis of insurgencies (*Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Delhi: Oxford U. P., 1983) of which this article is partly critical, there are a number of excellent studies of the Santal Rebellion published since 1940. For this article Kalikinkar Datta, *The Santal Insurrection of 1855-57* (Calcutta: Calcutta U. P., 1940) and Narahari Kaviraj, *Santal Village Community and the Santal Rebellion of 1855* (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 2001) has also been utilised together with archival studies at the India Office Library at the British Library during a sabbatical for six months in 2010. I wish to thank the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, University of Copenhagen for the sabbatical.

[2] The exaggerated deconstruction of *thugee* activities (for references and positions, see Kim A. Wagner, *Thuggee: Banditry and the British in Early Nineteenth-Century India* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2014 [2007])), 3-4, represent an Indian case.

[3] Ranajit Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* (1983) is directed towards 'insurgencies', and in some cases it has been necessary to retain this word, even if the present concept for the Santal *hul* is a 'rebellion'. N. Kaviraj (2001) is basically in agreement with Guha's position, regarding the Santals as peasants seeking alliances with similar groups of peasants among the lower castes.

[4] Ranajit Guha, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency", in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern* Studies (New York & Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1988), 45-86.

moneylenders, other Santals joined them, and the movement developed into a rebellion which was in turn severely suppressed by European and Indian soldiers during the autumn and winter of 1855-1856. The Santals tended the soil like other peasants, and other peasants might have allied with the Santals if they had conceived of them as fellow peasants of their own stock.

This debate with Guha addresses one point in the history of the ongoing discussion of distinctions between tribes and peasants in India.[5] A number of scholars have stressed the significant differences between tribal societies and peasant culture as a whole.[6] Guha's strong distinction between peasant society and higher strata of Indian society finds a new incarnation in P. Chatterjee's and Sinha's distinction between political and civil society.[7] Here Chatterjee assigns the term 'civil society' to peaceful interaction between the state and society, which he finds in the upper strata of society, whereas he assumes that the lower strata of society interact with the state through less peaceful means – hence the term 'political'. This assumption leads to the same kind of conjecture regarding the identity of tribespeople and peasants as the conjecture underlying Guha's argument. The tribespeople, here the Santals, were much more open to address the state than such a conjecture assumes. One may even argue that the rebellion could have been avoided if the lines of communication to the EIC's government in Calcutta had been open to receive the complaints forwarded by the lower strata of the rural population. This was, however, not the case in the years leading up to the Santal Rebellion.[8]

The present article stresses that assumptions regarding the difference between peasants and tribespeople have led Guha and other scholars in his line of argument to rely on untenable discursive arguments, resulting in their misinterpretation of other kinds of historical evidence. In this respect, the article follows the criticisms that have been raised in India against parts of post-colonial studies. One is the critique that S. Sarkar has forwarded in the line of E. P. Thomson.[9] Both have argued against the kind of evidence that is produced when historical studies turn to a discursive level, thereby ignoring actual social conditions. The other interrelated part of the critique is when post-colonial studies fails to make a full-fledged investigation of the social circumstances of events but only focuses on those circumstances that support that point for which the scholar wishes to argue.

In many ways, this is a factual approach to the study and must be investigated from case to case, but in the case of the Santal Rebellion, one can contrast the argument for a peasant rebellion with the numerous studies into insurgencies against the EIC from 1765 until the beginning of the 20th century.[10] In this case, Guha's focus on the structure of the insurgencies, the 'elementary aspects', causes him to lump the Santal Rebellion together with a number of other 'insurgencies' under the common heading of 'peasant insurgencies' even if it is near impossible to label them as such. These include a) insurgencies carried out by the forces of the landlords (*zamindars*), who had collected rent (taxes) and ruled the countryside

[5] See for instance, Uday Chandra, "Rethinking Subaltern Resistance", *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 45.4 (2015), 563-573; Alf Gunvald Nielsen and Srila Roy, "Introduction: Reconceptualizing Subaltern Politics in Contemporary India", in Alf Gunvald Nielsen and Srila Roy, eds., *New Subaltern Politics: Reconceptualizing Hegemony and Resistance in Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Oxford U. P. 2015), 1-27; Alf Gunvald Nilsen, "For a Historical Sociology of State-Society Relations in the Study of Subaltern Politics", in Alf Gunvald Nielsen and Srila Roy, eds., *New Subaltern Politics: Reconceptualizing Hegemony and Resistance in Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Oxford U. P., 2015), 31-53.

[6] For instance, Shashank Kela, "Adivasi and Peasant: Reflections on Indian Social History", in Shashank Kela, ed., *Adivasi and Peasant: Reflections on Indian Social History*, special issue of *Journal of Peasant Studies* 33.3 (2006), 502-525; Shashank Kela, *A Rogue and Peasant Slave: Adivasi Resistance, 1800-2000* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2012).

[7] Partha Chatterjee, "On Civil and Political Society in Postcolonial Democracies", in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani, eds., *Civil Society: History and Possibilities* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 2001), 165-178; Subir Sinha, "On the Edge of Civil Society in Contemporary India", in Alf Gunvald Nielsen and Srila Roy, eds., *New Subaltern Politics: Reconceptualizing Hegemony and Resistance in Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Oxford U. P., 2015), 225-253.

[8] Peter B. Andersen, "Den u-civile informationsudveksling mellem en kolonial stat og stammesamfund illustreret ud fra santaloprøret i Indien i 1855", in Margaretha Järvinen et al., eds., *Festskrift for professor Peter Gundelach* (working title) (in press).

[9] Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History* (Delhi: Oxford U. P., 1998). Edward Palmer Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory* (London: Merlin Press, 1995) presented a strong attack on the Marxist theoretical position of Louis Althusser and his followers in social history, who had begun to "declare that history was a non-discipline" (Dorothy Thompson, "'Introduction' to E. P. Thompson", *The Poverty of Theory* , xi) with the implication that they placed theory before empirical study.

[10] Kela, *A Rogue and Peasant Slave.*

under the Mughals, and b) insurgencies carried out with their support.[11] When peasants are led by landlords, they are not part of any peasant insurgency but are acting in relation to the hierarchical structures of the society in which they live.[12] As had already been pointed out, prior to Guha's argument[13] and also afterwards,[14] tribal rebellions differed from peasant rebellions. This has to do with the fact that the tribes of India form distinct social structures and are kept at distance by the majority populations of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh groups. Sometimes this exclusion includes low-caste groups of Hindus, sometimes not, but at the time of the Santal Rebellion, the concept of 'Hinduism' was only construed as referring to a community, so the fact remains that the Santals did not succeed in establishing alliances among other ethnic groups.[15] To a certain degree, Guha himself admits this, stating that: "When … an official document speaks of *badmash*es [rascals] as participants in rural disturbances, this does not mean (going by the normal sense of that Urdu word) any ordinary collection of rascals but peasants involved in militant agrarian struggle".[16] The difference between Guha's argument and the argument in the present article involves addressing "the dialogue between social being and social consciousness", as E. P. Thomsen has formulated it.[17]

Guha has also developed his eminent readings of the historical sources into a discursive classification in his study of 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency' (1988) in colonial India.[18] Here he divides the discourse into primary, secondary, and tertiary categories in relation to its distance from the events and the degree to which additional layers of interpretation have been added to the original sources. Guha's study has convincingly documented that the original correspondence from the EIC officers during the rebellion were strongly loaded against the rebellion (primary). The next level "draws on the primary discourse as materiel but transforms it at the same time".[19] Participants in the events wrote down their memoirs at a later point in time, adding information to frame the events. In Guha's analysis, they typically also added colonial reflections in retrospect, so the values in the discourse often become more evident (secondary). Then come the later histories, which look back at the events. Guha demonstrates how the attitudes of the early historians to the sack of Delhi in 1857 were indistinguishable from the state's official attitudes in their eagerness for revenge.[20] With regard to the Santals, he demonstrates that W. W. Hunter's essay on the Santal Rebellion, to which this article will return, attempted to offer an objective account of the events even Hunter's sympathy with the government can easily be documented (tertiary).[21] Hunter was in the service of the British Crown, but even Indian historians writing after Independence have to a great degree accepted the prose of the former colonial power's counter-insurgency when writing about the Santal Rebellion and other cases of insurgency against the EIC.

Guha is correct in his critique of the loaded colonial discourse when writing about insurgencies, and he offers proper evidence of later Indian historians who have been caught up in the colonial discourse when presenting insurgencies against

[11] One example may be the outbreaks of the rebellious Chuars or Choars in Midnapur and Bankura at the end of the 18th century. Amiya Kumar Banerji, *Bankura*, West Bengal District Gazetteers (Calcutta: Government of West Bengal, 1968), 123-124.

[12] The other side of the argument is that the expansion of commercial agriculture led to these problems. One case to support this may be the farmers and agricultural workers in indigo production, who rebelled at a time when indigo production faced particular difficulty. In this case, there is no doubt that the rebels are peasants, but they are specifically peasants undertaking early commercial agriculture (e.g. Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal Since 1770*, The New Cambridge History of India III: 2, Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1993, 47-52).

[13] For example, Binod Sankar Das, *Civil Rebellion in the Frontier Bengal, 1760-1805* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1973).

[14] See for instance, K. S. Singh, "Tribal Movements" Kamal K. Mishra and G. Jayaprakasan, eds., *Tribal Movements in India: Visions of Dr. K. S. Singh* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2012).

[15] Peter B. Andersen, "Revival, Syncretism, and the Anticolonial Discourse of the Kherwar Movement, 1871-1910", in Richard Fox Young, ed., *India and the Indianness of Christianity: Essays on Understanding – Historical, Theological, and Bibliographical – in Honor of Robert Eric Frykenberg* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 127-143.

[16] Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, 16.

[17] Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, eds., *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (Oxford, New York: Oxford U. P., 2011).

[18] D. J. Rycroft, *Representing Rebellion: Visual Aspects of Counter-insurgency in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford U. P., 2006) has utilised Guha's (1988) typology in an elegant analysis of the contemporary illustrations of the Santal Rebellion.

[19] Guha, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency", 50.

[20] Thomson, *The Poverty of Theory*, 12.

[21] Ibid., 65.

the EIC, but in this case he blinds himself to the differences between the diverse colonial sources. There had been a change in the ways in which the Santals were perceived between the rebellion in 1855-1856 and when Hunter published his account in 1868. Part of this change was due to the shift in government from that of the EIC to that of the British Crown. The Santal Rebellion took place under the colonial government of the EIC, but India came directly under the control of the Crown in 1858, ten years before Hunter arrived there in 1862 and joined the Indian Civil Service. This may be an underlying element in his 'objective' presentation of the Santal Rebellion, as he was critical of the EIC's policies – a consideration that Guha's narrow focus on the prose of counter-insurgency may have prevented him from recognising.

These critical remarks on Guha's approach should not, however, cause us to forget that his investigation into the religious reasons behind a number of insurgencies, including the Santal Rebellion, offers a new and coherent view of how insurgents "turned the world upside down" (*The Acts of the Apostles* 17.6) in a number of brilliant juxtapositions of carnivals, insurrections, and revolutions from around the world.[22] He has thus placed the oft-neglected and misunderstood religious legitimation of the rebellion in its proper and meaningful context.

[22] Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency.*

The Santals and the Santal RebellionTitle of Paragraph

The Santals were not reported about before the 1790s when the EIC changed its rent (i.e. revenue or tax) collection due to an acute need for increased revenue. The reform was called the Permanent Settlement (Land Revenue) (1793), and it made the job of collectors of the land rent inheritable as well as froze the land rent at an unchangeable amount of money. The reform was based on the rather naive idea that the collectors (the *zamindars*) would invest in the soil as soon as they were sure that they would not be evicted from it and would thus lead to an increase in the EIC's revenue from other sources. Just to be sure of its immediate income, however, the EIC set the land rent at an amount that was many times higher than any land rent collected before the reform, and afterwards the land rent was increased at irregular intervals.[23] For this reason, collectors of the land rent had to employ Santals to clear the jungles of cultivable soil. The Santals were reported in the eastern part of the Bengal Suba in 1795 (Ramgarh), and an increasing number of them migrated slightly to the north (crossing Godda between 1818 and 1827) to the Damin-i-Koh (the line of hills, 1827). This area had been demarcated for another tribal group, the Sauria Paharias, which, however, did not increase agricultural outputs there.[24] By 1851, the Santal population had increased to 83,265, distributed across 1,473 villages in the Damin-i-Koh.[25] Over the period from 1837 to 1854-55, the EIC's income increased from Rupees 6,682 to Rupees 58,033 (Fig. 1).

[23] Peter B. Andersen, *Santals: Glimpses of Culture and Identity* (Bhubaneswar: NISWSS, 2005), 2.

[24] Lewis Sydney Steward O'Malley, *Santal Parganas*, Bengal District Gazetteers (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1910), 95-98.

[25] Ibid, 44, 99.

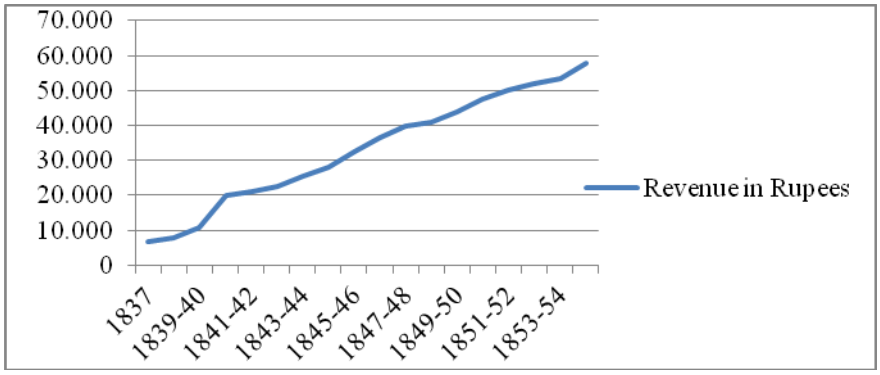

Fig. 1: Revenue of the Damin-i-Koh, 1837-1854-1855. Drawn on the basis of A. C. Bidwell's "Report on the Santal Rebellion", 14 February 1856. ©P. B. Andersen, "Rituel legitimering af santaloprøret", in Tim Jensen & Mikael Rothstein, eds., *Den sammenklappelige Tid. Festskrift til Jørgen Podemann Sørensen* (København: Forlaget Chaos, 2011).

We do not have figures for the Santals elsewhere before the Census of 1872, but a number of stray reports document that there were Santals in other parts of the Bhaugalpur and Birbhum Districts, and a contemporary letter assumes the presence of around 100,000 Santals in Midnapur District in 1855. There is also evidence that Santals has already crossed the Ganges and settled there before 1855.

When the Santals were employed to clear the soil for agriculture, it was the leader of the group of Santals, the *manjhi* (or *manki* in Bengali), who was appointed to negotiate on behalf of the group and to collect the rent for the *zamindar*.[26] As the Santals needed to borrow money for seeds and living expenses for the first year of their residence, they were soon trapped in debt to the *zamindar* or to Bengali money lenders.

The rebellion or the *hul*, as it is called in Santali. began on 9 July 1855 in the village Bhognadi, located a short distance to the north of Burhait, the main *bazar* or town in Damin-i-Koh.[27] The political event was that the two leaders of the rebellion, Sidu and Kanhu killed the local *daroga* (inspector of police), some of his constables, and a moneylender when they arrived to investigate the crowd that had assembled around the rebel leaders. After the killing, Sidu and Kanhu led some of the Santals in plundering and burning of the moneylenders' archives in the Damin-i-Koh and the surrounding areas of the province of Bengal. The rebellion soon spread northwards during the Damin-i-Koh to Rajmahal at the Ganges River, across the hills to the west towards Colong and to the district town Bhaugalpur, both at the Ganges River, to the southeast into the Birbhum District, and towards Suri, the district town and military camp.

On 26 July 1855, the Calcutta newspaper *Friend of India* reported that "within a hundred and twenty miles of the capital, an insurrection has been in full vigour for three weeks, almost out of check".[28] The rebellion was not defeated until early spring 1856. Besides plundering, the rebels abused and killed a significant number

[26] In the later surviving descriptions, this means of representing the group is sometimes implicitly recorded as a part of Santal culture, but it is also stated that the *manjhi* was appointed for this purpose alone. See, M. C. McAlpin, *Report on the Condition of the Sonthals in the Districts of Birbhum, Bankura, Midnapore and North Balasore* (Calcutta: Firma Mukhopadhyay, 1981 [1909]), 13-14; A. K. Banerji, *Bankura*, West Bengal District Gazetteers, 170. The acceptance of the actural *manjhi* is still ritually played out every January in the 'new year' ritual (*jom sim bonga*) of the Santals, even if changes to the now-hereditary post of *manjhi* seem to be carried out by other means.

[27] 9 July 1855 is usually regarded as the date on which the *daroga* was killed, but it is in fact the date of the letter in which the magistrate of Bhaugulpore, H. Richardson, reported the event to W. Grey, Secretary to the Government of Bengal. Magistrate of Bhaugulpore H. Richardson to W. Grey dated 9 July 1855, No. 5 of 25 July 1855, Bengal Judicial Proceedings, India Office Records, British Library (henceforth *BJP*), P/145/14.

[28] *Friend of India*, Calcutta, 26 July 1855, No. 1074, Vol. XXI (anonymous).

of Bengals, some people from other tribes, a few European men, and two European women.[29] Martial law was declared from 10 November 1855 until 3 January 1856. It is significant that atrocities – such as unnecessary violence and revenge – were carried out by soldiers under command and by Bengali civilians who took part in the military operations before, during, and after the period of Martial Law. During the full military operation, the EIC government in Calcutta was firm that violations of the law and crimes against the Santals were forbidden and should be avoided. At different points during the suppression of the rebellion, the EIC government promised amnesty for those Santals who laid down their weapons, and during the court cases following the rebellion, only a few Santals were convicted.[30] All of the central leaders of the rebellion were killed in fighting or hanged.

[29] Only the killings of the Europeans are formally counted. For all other groups, there is only the summary statement that "crimes might have been counted by thousands". Anonymous, "Sonthal Rebellion", *The Calcutta Review* (March 1856), 254.

[30] In March 1856, it was reported that 130 people had been convicted and sentenced to various punishments. Ibid., 252.

Primary Discourse

The *perwannahs* (proclamations) of Kanhu and Sidu, who led the rebellion, are preserved in translation, together with the sizeable correspondence concerning the repression of the rebellion in the *Bengal Judicial Proceedings* (*BJP*). This allows us to better understand the political aims of the rebellion, how participants imagined obtaining them, and how their thoughts developed over time depending on the situation. Early on in the rebellion, Kanhu and Sidu issued a proclamation on 25 July 1855[31] and sent it to the resident of Rajmahal. Here they stated that the 'Sahebs' had to leave the area and move to "the other side of the Ganges". In case the Europeans disobeyed this order and remained "on this side of the Ganges," they would be destroyed by a rain of fire sent by the god Thakur, and the bullets of the European soldiers' guns would "not strike the Sonthals".[32]

The *perwannah* also stated that: "Kanoo & Sidoo Manjee are not fighting.... The Thacoor himself will fight. Therefore you Sahibs and Soldiers fight with the Thacoor himself. Mother Ganges will come to the Thacoor's (assistance) Fire will rain from Heaven". Politically, the two leaders of the rebellion sought to collect taxes, as evidenced by their statement that: "The Thacoor has ordered the Sonthals that for a bullock plough 4 *anna* is to paid for revenue. Buffaloo plough 2 *anna*", and that "the reign of truth has began" (*sic*). This kingdom of truth was further explained in another formulation, which stressed that: "The compassion of religion and investigation of religion will commence". It continued with information on the punishment for those who responded incorrectly: "He that will act treacherously (*bedharm*) will not be able to stay on earth".[33] Sidu and Kanhu thus worked for the introduction of new and more abstract notions of morality than those which had hitherto been known among the Santals.

When the rebellion began to go wrong, its local leaders reported this in a number of undated letters to Sidu and Kanhu, stating that soldiers had fought down the Santals and requesting Sidu and Kanhu to rejoin the fight.[34]

[31] '10th Sowan 1262' or 10 Sravana 1262 B.S., which corresponds to 25 July 1855 AD (Datta, *The Santal Insurrection,* 8.

[32] Sidoo Manjhee and Kanoo Manjee, "This is he who sends the Thakoors Perwannah", attached to a letter from H. Richardson, Magistrate of Bhaugulpore to W. Grey, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dated Rajmehal 24 July 1855. This letter is filed as No. 222 of 23 August 1855, *BJP*. Most of these letters were written in Hindi in a script typical of the commercial correspondence at the Gangetic plain. One of the letters is in Persian characters, as for Urdu. Some of the other letters were written in Bengali. As most of the leaders of the rebellion were unable to write, the *perwannahs* were primarily written by people employed or forced to do so at the court they set up around themselves.

[33] Ibid.

[34] For example, Papers Nos 8, 9, *BJP* 23rd to 30th August 1855, P/145/16, inserted as a Special File number among Oct. Toogood's reports of his campaign.

In the court case following his arrest, Kanhu toned down the intention of the rebellion and stated that he had only sought to collect money in order to pay it directly to the Government (*Sirkar*) rather than through the Indian intermediaries, namely the "*darogha* or the *izaradar* '*Pulteen*' Sahebs".[35] With regard to the beginning of the rebellion, he explained that he had sent a *perwannah* to the *darogah* who was killed when the rebellion began. Here, Kanhu had ordered the *darogah* to come to him, but the *darogah* had not acted in accordance with Kanhu's command, as the moneylenders (*mahajans*) had bribed him to instead arrest Kanhu and his brothers. So the *darogah* had provoked Kanhu and the other Santals, which had led to a heated argument in which the money lenders – according to Kanhu – had offered the *darogah* an increased bribe: "The *mahajans* said if it costs us 1000 rupees. we will do that to get you imprisoned". In the end, Kanhu admitted that he had cut the leading moneylender "Manick Mudie's head off and Seedoo killed the *Darogah* and my army killed 5 men whose names I do not know, then we all returned to Bhagnadee". Except for this killing, Kanhu denied having killed other people or having ordered the Santals to kill anyone. He also stressed that he did not order the killing of the two European women who were killed during the rebellion.[36] In contrast to Kanhu's deposition, two *barkandazes* (constables or armed retainers) and a *pyada* (sepoy) who had escaped the events stressed that the *daroga* had behaved correctly, and they did not mention the alleged attempt to bribe the *daroga*.[37] During the examinations, Kanhu explained that the god Thakur did not keep his promise to protect the Santals by turning the bullets of the muskets into water because, "my troops committed some crime therefore the Thacoors prediction were not fulfilled".[38]

During the rebellion, the officers of the EIC investigated whether the Santal leaders had managed to extend the rebellion beyond their own ethnic group. First, the Santals had sent emissaries to the former Amir (Emir), Meer Abbas Ali Khan as well as other dignitaries in the hope that they would support the rebellion. Neither the former Amir[39] nor any other dignitary from among the *zamindars* supported the rebellion. Although it is true that: "Certain castes like *kumars* (potters), *telis* (oilmen), blacksmiths, *momins* (Muhammadan weavers), *chamars* (shoemakers) and *domes*, who were obedient to the Santals and helped them in several ways",[40] these people were exceptions and can simply be regarded as people from other groups living among the Santals in the villages. Bengalis who lived elsewhere were reported to have feared the rebellion and fled from it. Among the individuals responsible for capturing Kanoo were Ghatwals, Gwalla, and a Chowkidar.[41]

Secondary discourse

During the rebellion, some EIC officers supported revenge on the Santals and even suggested mass deportation, but afterwards the officers who participated in

[35] Examination by F. S. Bird Brigadier, at Camp Ranegunge 1st Dec. 1855, Statement of Insurgent Sonthals, 1 Kanoo Manjee Soobah 2 Chand Manjee 3. Bhyroo Manjee & Kamoo alias Intha Soobah, *BJP*.

[36] Examination of Kanoo Sonthal, by A. Eden, Dated Camp Koomrabad 12th December 1855. No. 132 of 20th December 1855, *BJP*.

[37] Datta, *The Santal Insurrection,* 17.

[38] Examination of Kanoo Sonthal, by A. Eden, Dated Camp Koomrabad 12th December 1855, No. 132 of 20th December 1855, *BJP*.

[39] Mr. J. Allan, Commissionar of Chotanagpur to William Grey, Esq., Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Fort William, dated Hazaribagh, the 17th December, 1855, printed ad Appendix A1, in Datta, *The Santal Insurrection,* 81-85.

[40] Datta, *The Santal Insurrection,*16.

[41] No. 4 Kamoo, in the Examination by F. S. Bird Brigadier, at Camp Ranegunge 1st Dec. 1855, Statement of Insurgent Sonthals, 1 Kanoo Manjee Soobah 2 Chand Manjee 3. Bhyroo Manjee & Kamoo alias Intha Soobah, *BJP*.

the suppression stated how valiantly the leaders of and participants in the rebellion had behaved, contributing to the general re-legitimation of Santal culture and society in the eyes of the government.

The Santal participants who later recounted their experiences during the rebellion often stated that the rebellion failed because Sidu and Kanhu had sinned and broken the orders of Thakur. Sometime between 1892 and 1927, another Santal, by the name of Durga, recounted how he and his *pargana* (headman governing a number of villages) had been forced to join the rebellion. At the time of the rebellion, Durga had been a young man and was the father of one child. With regard to Sidu and Kanhu, he stated that they had fornicated with women they had found beautiful and who they had ordered their messengers to bring to them. He concluded his narration with the statement that "Sidu and Kanhu thus became defiled and unclean. They committed unrighteous acts. Because they were lusting after other people's women, they defiled their religious and moral virtue".[42]

Since other sources similarly recount that the leaders of the rebellion raped women, it is unfortunately likely that Durga's report is correct, even if this kind of behaviour is "a standard theme in the Hindu image of immoral kings".[43] In the present context, regarding the history of the rebellion, the sins of Sidu and Kanhu were stressed again during the later Kherwar movement among the Santals. That movement began in 1871 (perhaps as early as in 1869).[44] In accordance with a narrative of Sagram Murmu recorded later in 1906 or shortly thereafter, one of the early leaders in this political movement, Bhagrit Baba, is said to have stated that the Government of India ("the Sahebs") brought rice from Burma during the famine in 1874 because the Sahebs:

> know very well that one day the 'dark-skinned' sons of this land will get the country, they know it definitely. In Sido's and Kanhu's time, Cando[45] wanted to give us the country. But they could not carry out their office; they could not control their greed and began to snatch away the daughters and daughters-in-law of others. They did unjust acts in the eyes of Cando; this is why he in his turn did not give the country to them; and as he did not approve of misdeeds, they could not win their fight.[46]

So the Santals ended up looking back on the rebellion as having been lost due to the sins of the leaders – not the crimes or sins of the Santal soldiers, as Kanhu interpreted it, but the sins committed by Sidu and Kanhu themselves. In retrospect, one can see that some Santals continued working against the colonial regime, as is evident from the quote of the Kherwar guru. Other Santals accepted the defeat and came to see the colonial regime as just,[47] at least up until the late-19th or early-20th century.

The last text that will illustrate the secondary discourse is Digambar Chakrabortti's *History of the Santal Hool of 1855*. It belongs to the secondary discourse in so far as the author was a child during the rebellion, and some of the

[42] Durga from Mundha Am, "The Story of the Santal Rebellion", in Andersen et al., eds., *From Fire Rain to Rebellion,* section 27, 180-181.

[43] Andersen et al., eds., *From Fire Rain to Rebellion,* 215.

[44] Joseph Troisi, *Tribal Religion: Religious Beliefs and Practices among the Santals* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1978), 255-26; P. B. Andersen, "Revival from a Native Point of View: Proselytization of the Indian Home Mission and the Kherwar Movement among the Santals", in Judith M. Brown and Robert Eric Frykenberg, eds., *Christians, Cultural Interactions, and India's Religious Traditions* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 119-132.

[45] Cando 'the Moon' – or rather Sin Cando 'the Sun' – is here another name for Thakur.

[46] Sagram Murmu, "The Kherwar Movement", in Andersen et al., eds., *From Fire Rain to Rebellion,* section 11, 220-223.

[47] For instance, Andersen, "Revival from a Native Point of View", 129.

events are described with him as an eyewitness, yet he may nevertheless have been influenced by the tertiary discourse. As a result, it is necessary to introduce the tertiary discourse first.

With regard to colonial discourses, it is evident that the various voices and writers related themselves to the colonial power of the EIC or the British Crown through the actual government in Calcutta. But this is evidently not the only way in which the voices relate to each other. Up until and throughout the rebellion, there were different voices in the Santal community concerning how to respond morally and strategically to challenges from the outside.

Tertiary discourse

The account of the Santal Rebellion in W. W. Hunter's chapter on "The Aboriginal Hill-Men of Beerbhoom" in his *Annals of Rural Bengal*, published in 1868, is the first full-fledged interpretation of the rebellion in a larger handbook-like publication, and it has come to be a key reference as well as a point of dispute.[48] As R. Guha rightly states, this is:

> a remarkable text. Written within a decade of the Mutiny and twelve years of the *hool*, it has none of that revanchist and racist overtone common to a good deal of Anglo-Indian literature of the period. Indeed the author treats the enemies of the Raj not only with consideration but with respect although they had wiped it off from three eastern districts in a matter of weeks and held out for five months against the combined power of the colonial army and its newly acquired auxiliaries – railways and the 'electric telegraph'.[49]

[48] William Wilson Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1868), 236-257.

[49] Guha, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency", 65.

Guha, of course, also demonstrates how Hunter describes the colonial power of the EIC as a benevolent government and how Hunter blames "the outbreak of the *hool* squarely on that 'cheap and practical administration' which paid no heed to the Santals' complaints and concentrated on tax collection alone". He points out that Hunter went "on to catalogue the somewhat illusory benefits of 'the more exact system that was introduced after the revolt' to keep the power of the usurers over debtors within the limits of the law".[50] In this regard, Guha is correct: Hunter was a utilitarian and saw the government as obliged to work for the benefit of the people. Guha, however, forgets that Hunter was appointed by the British Crown and not by the EIC, a difference that becomes evident when one looks at Hunter's generalisations regarding the former government in comparison to the government of the British Crown. Hunter states that:

[50] Ibid., 68.

> The servants of an association like the East India Company, which had to make its dividends out of the revenues, were constantly liable to the temptation of looking at government in the light of a mercantile undertaking, and of estimating its success by its profit.[51]

[51] Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal*, 232.

Hunter says that this was a "temptation the Court of Directors [of the EIC] resisted with a consistency most creditable to our nation, but ambitious subordinates in India sometimes took a narrower view," but he continues that: "the benign maxim that Indian governors are the trustees of the Indian people, not merely a few hundred English shareholders obtained a full and definite recognition only when India passed under the British Crown".[52] Hunter thus admits that one of the reasons for the rebellion was the exploitation of the Santals through land rent and taxes, something that happened under the former government but that would not happen under the government of the British Crown.

[52] Ibid.

In this regard, it is interesting that Hunter is the first scholar who states that the rebellion was intended as a kind of a democratic demonstration, which should carry a petition to the government. "A general order went through the encampment to move down upon the plains towards Calcutta, and on the 30th June 1855 the vast expedition set out. The bodyguard of the leaders alone amounted to 30.000 men. As long as the food which they had brought from their villages lasted, the march was orderly",[53] but once the food ran out, the protest turned into plundering. Hunter dates the event that ended in the killing of the *daroga* to 7 July 1855, and he states that the "foolhardy inspector ... ordered his guards to pinion them [Sidu and Kanhu]" and that "Sidu slew the corrupt inspector with his own hands".[54]

[53] Ibid., 238-239.

[54] Ibid, 239-240. With regard to the *perwannahs*, Hunter stresses that he had not discovered any of them but that he trusted contemporary writers as to their existence (238, note 69).

All later research on the rebellion has had to consider its start, and many scholars (including the present author) have accepted Hunter's view that it was intended as a peaceful demonstration,[55] even if there is no documentation for this in the early accounts, neither in the *perwannahs*, in the court case against Kanhu, nor in the contemporary press.

[55] For instance, K. K. Datta, *The Santal Insurrection;* Stephen Fuchs, *Rebellious Prophets: A Study of Messianic Movements in Indian Religions* (Asia Publishing House: London, 1965), 51; P. B. Andersen, "Revival from a Native Point of View", 128; though not R. Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*; nor N. Kaviraj, *Santal Village Community and The Santal Rebellion of 1855* (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 2001).

It is now possible to return to the Digambar Chakrabortti's *History of the Santal Hool of 1855* (reprint 1989). Formally, the text belongs to the secondary discourse as D. Chakrabortti was about six years old at the time of the rebellion. He belonged to the Pakur Raj family of Kanauji Brahmins, and he states that he remembers parts of how he fled with his family. But when it comes to the Santals' gruesome killing of his relative, the Dewan, he must draw upon the account of the Dewan's sister, who witnessed the event as she was "lying concealed in a ditch".[56] The editor of the text argues that Chakrabortti wrote it sometime in 1895 or 1896.[57] This may have occurred at an even later point in time, but the dating to the middle of the 1890s gives evidence that Hunter's publication had already existed for about a quarter of a century. So it is interesting that the *daroga*, according to Chakrabortti, managed to arrest some of the Santals and began "to beat them with a dog whip he had in his hand"[58] and that the killing of the *daroga* was carried out by unknown Santals and not by Kanhu (as Kanhu had himself confessed in court). In this text, the decision to "proceed southward [towards Calcutta], as was directed by Cando Bonga and ask the great Firengee [European] Sahib at Calcutta why did he allow the obnoxious money-lenders to rob harass the poor people"[59] was taken after the

[56] Digambar Chakrabortti, *History of the Santal Hool of 1855*, edited by Arun Chowdhury (Aligarh: Rajnagar Lamps, 1989), 39.

[57] Arun Chowdhury, "History of Santal Rebellion: A Pioneer", in Arun Chowdhury ed., [Digambar Chakrabortti's] *History of the Santal Hool of 1855* (Aligarh: Rajnagar Lamps, 1989) 7.

[58] Digambar Chakrabortti, *History of the Santal Hool,* 26.

[59] Ibid., 27.

beheading of the *daroga*. This clashes with Hunter's description, which allows the killing be a consequence of the problems involved in maintaining an orderly demonstration on the way to Calcutta.

One can say that Chakrabortti offers a very positive account of the rebellion and systematically seeks to acquit Sidu and Kanhu of all accusations in a way that seems to be a further development of Hunter's account. With regard to the discourses, it is difficult to place this account in any linear relation to the colonial situation. Chakrabortti belongs to the wealthy *zamindars* and is related to one of the "obnoxious" moneylenders who – to some degree – were a product of the colonial system. He also belonged to a family that had lost at least one leading member in a gruesome killing during the rebellion. Nevertheless, Chakrabortti forwards his own very positive attitude towards the Santals and the actions of its leaders.

Summary and conclusion

Looking back at the argument, it becomes evident that Guha took his discursive approach too far when he identified the Santal Rebellion with peasant insurgencies. It is evident that the rebellion was a tribal rebellion. His further systematisation of the 'Prose of Counter-Insurgency' has proved open to demands for the inclusion various voices, colonial as well as Santal, and their interpretations of the rebellion.

Regarding the later interpretation of the events, it is evident that the Santals reinterpreted the rebellion as having been lost due to moral sin. One of its main leaders, Kanhu, interpreted it as due to possible crimes or rather sins committed by his army. Later, Santals who had been part of the rebellion stressed that Sidu and Kanhu had themselves sinned, and at an even later point in time, around 1870, this became part of the legitimation of a new religious movement: the Kherwars worked to cleanse the Santals of their sins so that the Santals could retrieve their power.

These aspects of the narrative received new impetus with the publication of W. W. Hunter's chapter on the rebellion in 1868. Hunter reinterprets the rebellion as an attempt to organise a peaceful demonstration to the government in Calcutta. This interpretation influenced the narrative presentations in the wealthy Brahmin Chakrabortti's account of the rebellion.

This is nothing more than what a historical investigation of the rebellion might have expected to encounter, yet it raises some problems for R. Guha's interpretation of 'the prose of counter-insurgency' inasmuch as space is opened for a number of other levels of relations to the colonial power than are assumed in Guha's otherwise-elegant analysis of three continuative levels of discourse, which depend on distance from the participants. The problems with Guha's analysis are especially clear with regard to meaning of the change of the government from the EIC to the British Crown as well as the positive evaluation of the leaders of the rebellion in the narration of the Brahmin who had been forced to flee the

rebellion. One might say that Guha's strict analytical approach, with his three levels, ends up concealing the development in the discourse from his own analysis.

We can allow ourselves to be inspired by Guha's reading of the sources, but must also recognise that it is flawed to classify them in relation to the colonial power. The sources should instead be regarded in relation to the numerous interest groups they represent and by which they have been utilised over the years. This approach offers no simple understanding of the colonial system, but it promises to open space for new and more nuanced understandings than are possible within the three discursive levels.

Daniel J. Rycroft

Locating Adivasi Politics. Aspects of 'Indian' Anthropology After Birsa Munda

Abstract: The article assesses the ways in which a historic Adivasi figure, Birsa Munda, entered into the national imaginary in India before Independence. The pivotal role of early anthropologists, notably Sarat Chandra Roy, and the formation of 'Indian' anthropology (as a field of intellectual and cultural politics) are emphasised. The analysis focuses on the ways in which the posthumous presence of Birsa Munda becomes significant in two phases, following his untimely death in Ranchi prison in 1900. First, the period immediately after the suppression of the Birsaite *ulgulan* (insurgency) of 1898-1900 is addressed in terms of the convergence of administrative and anthropological priorities. The second phase (1912 to mid-1930s) raises the question of how the nationalisation of anthropology and culture in India was premised in part on the 'integration' of Munda pasts. I argue that in the wake of the Government of India Act (1935) and in advance of the annual assembly of the Indian National Congress (1940) opportunities arose for Birsa Munda to become a vehicle of what Radhakamal Mukerjee had earlier termed 'intermediation', i.e., the synthesis of national and sub-national, or tribal, entities. The visual aspects of integration and the cultural politics of intermediation are debated with specific reference to time and evolution, and in advance of conclusions concerning real and metaphorical archives.

Keywords: *historical framework*, *national heritage*, *temporal dynamics*, *indigenous pasts*

> In the Hindu scriptures such great personages [i.e. those people who – following episodes of cultural integration – were celebrated for generating cultural 'progress' through their elevated dharma or 'right' living] are regarded as incarnations of the Deity. Such exceptional personages, though rare, are not quite unknown even in the lower cultures.... In primitive societies their activities generally take the form of religious reform or revival. Such was the Birsaite movement among the Mundas of Chotanagpur in 1898-1900.
>
> Sarat Chandra Roy, "An Indian Outlook on Anthropology"

Relocating Birsa Munda

This article addresses the shifting presence of Birsa Munda, an Adivasi (indigenous/tribal) prophet and insurgent, in national imaginaries in the early-20th century. Although Birsa is now remembered singularly as a 'regional' freedom fighter within central India, during the pre-Independence phase his historic identity was more fluid. Activating a revolutionary political consciousness during the 1890s, a period before 'Indian' approaches to political and social science came into existence, Birsa and his movement have since been the focus of much anthropological and heritage work, as intimated in the above quotation from Sarat Chandra Roy. Nowadays, this work largely emphasises the historic contribution of

Birsa to the discourse of collective rights in Jharkhand (a region intimately associated with Adivasi protests and identity movements).[2] In the post-colonial decades it highlighted the significance of the *ulgulan* to histories of agrarian and anti-colonial unrest.[3] In the pre-Independence era, Birsa's posthumous persona assumed other characteristics. These alluded to his embodiment of 'Munda' ancestry and tribal consciousness, and the relevance of his 'visionary' personality both to modern India and to Indian civilisation.[4] The pivotal role of 'Indian' anthropology, in linking histories of Adivasi rebellion to national aspirations and to national time, is therefore addressed here. So, what is the preferred starting point for this enquiry: rebellion as a historical fact, or empowerment as a collective prospect?

Whilst much historical work has elucidated his subaltern and activist being,[5] the period *following* Birsa's demise in 1900 as a captive at Ranchi jail has received relatively little historical attention. Even as this period (1900-1912) witnessed the birth of what one might call a pro-Munda sentiment amongst anthropologists and administrators, which called for a greater understanding of the socio-political and cultural dynamics of regions inhabited by Adivasis and prompted widespread engagements with the neglected issue of tenancy rights in Chotanagpur, the epistemological and representational complexities defining this moment *after* Birsa have yet to be addressed. In this article I contend that two periods following the capture and death of Birsa are significant, especially in terms of the interface of Indian anthropology and politics. These incorporate the periods of 1900 to 1912 and 1912 to the mid-1930s respectively. Besides their provision of worthwhile entry points into subaltern and Adivasi studies,[6] these periods each raise important methodological and conceptual issues. The article continues with an exploration of these historical frameworks before broaching the temporal dynamics of Birsa's posthumous integration within the emergent nation. This discussion precedes an analysis of the ways in which Birsa's presence became identifiable as a site of national intermediation and traversed both post-*ulgulan* and pre-Independence phases.

The decade after Birsa gave the British administration an opportunity to question its own imperialistic approach to colonial governance, and to find ways to redress, albeit from above, the historical grievances of some subordinate groups. Of these, it was the Munda population and the Birsaites (the Munda followers of Birsa and Birsaism) who became subject to re-imagining. This happened in ways that transgressed the existing administrative memory of Mundas, for example by differentiating between political agitators and non-political Birsaites.[7] These adjustments served as a prelude to subsequent representations of Adivasi society that were exemplified by the new 'Indian' anthropology and the colonial response to this.[8]

As an emergent field that incorporated political and epistemological concerns, 'Indian' anthropology grew during the 1920s-30s by building bridges and

[2] Nandini Sundar, "Laws, Policies and Practices in Jharkhand", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40.41 (2005), 4459-4462; Marine Carrin, "Jharkhand: Alternative Citizenship in an 'Adivasi State'", in Peter Berger and Frank Heidemann, eds. *The Modern Anthropology of India: Ethnography, Themes and Theory* (London: Routledge, 2013), 106-120.

[3] See Kumar Suresh Singh, *Dust-Storm and the Hanging Mist* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1966).

[4] Roy, "Indian Outlook", 148.

[5] For an overview of this, see Daniel J. Rycroft, "Revisioning Birsa Munda", in Nava Kishor Das and V. B. Rao, eds., *Identity, Cultural Pluralism and State* (New Delhi: Macmillan Publishers, 2009), 261-280.

[6] Daniel J. Rycroft and Sangeeta Dasgupta, eds. *The Politics of Belonging in India* (London: Routledge, 2011), 59-63.

[7] See for example Select Committee on the Amendment Bill, *Report: Chotanagpur Tenancy (Amendment) Bill 1903* (18 July, 1903), IOR/L/PJ/6/649.2245 (British Library), citing the committee members' reflection in April 1903 on histories of Munda 'agitation' in Ranchi district.

[8] On the formation of 'Indian' anthropology, see Daniel J. Rycroft, "Indian Anthropology and the Construction of Tribal Ethnicity before Independence", in Swarupa Gupta, ed., *Nationhood and Identity Movements in Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2012), 141-166, and Patricia Uberoi et al., "Introduction", in Patricia Uberoi et al., eds., *Anthropology in the East* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2007), 1-63.

generating intersections between colonial ethnology and an ethically-aware 'Hindu' or indigenous sociology.[9] Roy was integral to the public understanding of this phase of anthropological thinking.[10] By the mid- to late-1930s it had become a credible and engaging crucible of scholarly exposition, political solidarity, and cultural affirmation, with 'culture' then being thought of in accordance with evolutionary and modern/national perspectives.[11] In the first decade of the 20th century, its ideational aspects – which sought a productive relation of culture, presence and time – had yet to be articulated. It was during this post-*ulgulan* phase, however, that such seminal writers as Roy responded by producing a series of text-based and administrative tracts that gave epistemological and political currency to wide-ranging Munda, Indian and western/colonial ideas.[12] The performative role of these texts, in identifying, analysing and picturing the distinctiveness of 'the Mundas' and their experience of various political regimes is noteworthy. The period from 1900-1912 captured these transformations, and culminated in the publication of a series of anthropological vignettes by Roy on pre-colonial and contemporary Munda history, with this latter concept being defined in lieu of an active Birsaite movement or presence.[13]

A subsequent phase, starting *after* these publications, i.e. from 1912 to the mid-1930s, can thereby also be conceptualised. Like the period that preceded it, this phase occurred *after* Birsa (and in accordance with linear time). Unlike the period that started with Birsa's capture and death in captivity, the phase after 1912 was inaugurated by Roy's public dissemination of Birsa's portrait. The duration of this phase broadly correlates with Sangeeta Dasgupta's exploration of the mid-1910s to mid-1930s, in respect of Roy's Oraon-facing anthropological work.[14] Heralded by the re-publication of these vignettes and some additional material in 1912 as *The Mundas and Their Country*, this period of India's intellectual, political and cultural activity culminated in the highly contentious Government of India Act (1935), Roy's articulation of "An Indian Outlook on Anthropology" (1938) and the congregation of the Indian National Congress (INC) in Jharkhand (1940). Unlike Dasgupta's historical framework, my analysis of this period focuses on Roy's Munda-oriented anthropology. At one level, this period can be considered in linear or sequential terms. I posit that it can also be apprehended through non-linear or deep time, given the political and intangible forces that made the representation of Birsa meaningful in the lead up to national independence.

As will be highlighted, the Government of India Act rendered conspicuous, via the use of 'anthropological' idioms, histories and materials, the supposed social and spatial distinctiveness of Adivasi *vis-à-vis* non-Adivasi populations.[15] Some 'tribal' areas were thereby excluded from those zones deemed (by colonials) to be governable by the INC.[16] The phase from 1912-1930s witnessed the birth of pro-tribal protectionism, an attitude that traversed both colonial and national anthropological discourses. In the terms of the present article, it is important to note that the nationalisation of anthropology also assumed visual form. By the

[9] Uberoi et al., *Anthropology in the East*, 22. On the relation of 'Hindu' ethics to modern India, see S. Radhakrishnan, "The Ethics of Vedanta", *International Journal of Ethics*, 24.2 (1914), 168-183; S. Radhakrishnan, "The Hindu Dharma", *International Journal of Ethics*, 33.1 (1922), 1-22; R. Mukerjee, "Conscience and Culture: A Biosocial Approach to Morals", *Ethics*, 60.3 (1950), 178-183.

[10] See Sangeeta Dasgupta, "Recasting the Oraons and the 'Tribe': Sarat Chandra Roy's Anthropology", in Uberoi et al., eds. *Anthropology in the East*, 132-171.

[11] D. Raina and S. I. Habib, "The Moral Legitimation of Modern Science: Bhadralok Reflections on Theories of Evolution", *Social Studies of Science*, 26.1 (1996), 9-42.

[12] See, for example, Sarat Chandra Roy, "Origin of the Kol Tribes", *The Modern Review*, 6.4 (1909), 320-7; "The Early History of the Mundas", *The Modern Review*, 8.1 (1910), 15-26; "The Curious History of a Munda Fanatic", *The Modern Review*, 9.6 (1911), 545-554. Also see N. K. Bose, "Foreword", in S. C. Roy, *The Mundas and their Country* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1970).

[13] See previous references, plus Sarat Chandra Roy, "The Medieval Period of Mundari History", *The Modern Review*, 8.3 (1910), 233-242; "The Modern Period of Mundari History", *The Modern Review*, 8.5 (1910), 391-395; "Agrarian Discontent and the Protestant Missions in Chotanagpur", *The Modern Review*, 8.6 (1910), 615-628; "The Catholic Mission", *The Modern Review*, 9.5 (1911), 454-459.

[14] Dasgupta, "Recasting the Oraons", 132.

[15] Also see Daniel J. Rycroft, "India's Adivasis (Indigenous/Tribal Peoples) and Anthropological Heritage", in J. Hendry and L. Fitznoor, eds., *Anthropologists, Indigenous Scholars and the Research Endeavour* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 80-93.

[16] On related concerns, see Crispin Bates, "Congress and the Tribals", in M. Shepperdson and C. Simmons, eds., *The Indian National Congress and the Political Economy of India 1885-1985* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1988), 231-252.

1930s, modern Indian artists had begun to develop new *post*-primitivist attitudes, referring at once to colonialist tropes whilst validating alternative ways of perceiving social and ethnic difference.[17] These generally corresponded with the national idea/aesthetic of social integration.[18] Interestingly, the 1912-1930s phase is also characterised by the production and dissemination of overtly national or 'integrative' representations of Munda history, as elaborated by Roy and as expressed visually in Upendra Maharathi's portrait of Birsa: see Figure 1. It was through such representations that Birsa's intangible presence accrued legibility, in terms of an elevated dharma, which could be taken up both in objective and subjective domains, such as 'history' and 'the present' respectively.

Depicted as 'Lord Birsa' (Birsa Bhagwan), this almost devotional portrait as well as the photograph that informed it have since been subject to many revisions.[19] Like other textual, oral, and politico-cultural legacies associated with Birsaism, the visual afterlives of Birsa engaged various temporal trajectories. The complex temporal dynamics of anthropological and visual representations are key to my analysis. I will use Maharathi's drawing to explore how the posthumous Birsa and, by implication, the various periods *after* Birsa contributed to an engaging 'national' and anthropological dialogue. How did this dialogue engage the political and cultural aspects of national and tribal pasts? Were the *inter*-cultural complexities of bringing different pasts together – for example via new visual and mnemonic practices – resolved? In more particular terms, how could civilisational or evolutionary time coexist – via processes and articulations of 'intermediation' – with tribal or insurgent time?

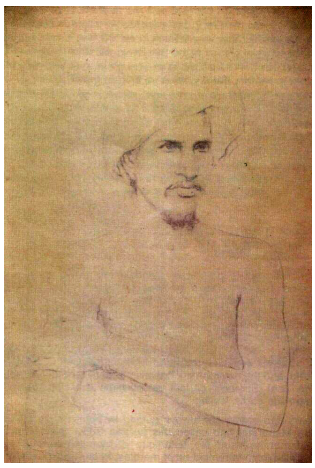

Fig. 1: Upendra Maharathi, *Birsa Bhagwan* (Lord Birsa), 1938, pencil drawing, Patna Museum; photograph courtesy of the author.

Images like Maharathi's point to the historical reality that such issues were broached productively in the mid- to late-1930s, thereby suggesting that further attention can be directed to the relation of anthropology and art in modern India. Maharathi's drawing introduced (a) a time of retrospection, by referring to Birsa's eventful and elevated life, (b) a time of prospection, by heralding Birsa's renewal in the present, and (c) a time of introspection, by offering the image as an opportunity for the cultivation of personal and/or collective *swaraj* or freedom. Remembering that devotional attitudes often came to the surface in nationalist Bengal,[20] the posthumous relationship between Birsa and his interlocutors can be underscored. The article will broach this relationship and assess its intercultural dynamics, but what of anthropology *per se*?

[17] See, for example, the emphasis on 'primitivism' as a modern art discourse re-tuned according to East-West relations, Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-garde, 1922-1947* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 12, 33-36, 78-83, 90-98; also see Daniel J. Rycroft, "Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Art and Swadeshi (1909-1911)*", in D. Newall and G. Pooke, eds., *Fifty Key Texts in Art History* (London: Routledge, 2012), 63-68.

[18] See N. Datta-Majumder, "The Tribal Problem", in Government of India, ed., *The Adivasis* (Delhi: Government of India Press, 1955), 21-27.

[19] For example, see the copy-print of 'Birsa Munda' displayed in C. A. Bayley, ed., *The Raj: India and the British, 1600-1947* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 1991), 347. Interestingly, this copy-print is described as being derivative of the initial photograph rather than of the drawing, thereby overlooking Maharathi's artistic intervention.

[20] Andrew Sartori, "The Categorical Logic of a Colonial Nationalism: Swadeshi Bengal, 1904-1908", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23.1 (2003), 271-85.

Roy's monograph (1912) was the first site at which Birsaite pasts and national futures came to exist publicly and, in turn, coexist as they were embraced by other 'civilisational' idioms, such as Indian art.[21] The publication emerged from a political milieu that was conspicuously *post*-Birsa. Based in the Ranchi area of Jharkhand, which was adjacent to the initial locus of the Birsaite rebellion, the colonial administration of Chotanagpur endeavoured to work with Roy and diverse 'experts', such as European missionaries, regional land-owners and Bengali administrators, to create some semblance of justice for dispossessed Munda Adivasis.[22] This administrative community came up with the idea to re-visit the controversial issues of ancestral land holdings and associated tenures, to the extent that Ranchi was re-formed as a district to reflect the patterns of these *khunt-kattidar* (original clearer of villages) practices.[23] Three decades later, this district became embroiled in the Reforms Office debates on the political status of Partially Excluded Areas (PEAs) within the Government of India Act. It was considered a PEA given the relative predominance of its Munda inhabitants, its history of conflict, and the perceived necessity of implementing policies of 'minority' representation.[24] In other words, the Birsaite (insurgent) and post-Birsaite (post-insurgent) dynamics came to coalesce, meaning that opportunities arose for Birsa to be remembered in accordance with both Munda and non-Munda, or non-Adivasi, value systems.

Here, I identify 1912, replete with metaphorical 'release' via Roy's monograph of Birsa from the administrative archive to the public domain, as a pivotal moment in the representational and political histories under consideration. It marked the culmination of Roy's historical and anthropological work on 'the Mundas' and the origin of Birsa's iconic presence in the public sphere. As such, a phase post-1912 becomes traceable. I would argue that this latter period culminated in the mid-1930s, as the contests over the definition and administration of PEAs came to the foreground of nationalist politics. The production and use of Maharathi's portrait of Birsa by the INC in Jharkhand was an expression of this. It activated synergetic ideas of national/tribal political consciousness, and thereby came to contest the colonial assertion that Ranchi and the 'Munda country' was unfit for governance by Indian nationals.

Given the political transformations embodied by Birsa during his life, from being a healer and a (jailed) prophet to becoming the leader of one of India's infamous 'subaltern' rebellions – and then dying as a second-time prisoner – it is no easy task to trace the ways in which he acquired a broader cultural presence and historical legibility, first after 1900 and then after 1912. As suggested, influential members of the Congress movement engaged new temporal notions, pertaining to both Jharkhand-after-Birsa and India-before-Independence, through Birsa's memory. As such, the emergent political reality of Congress-oriented tribal

[21] Daniel Rycroft, "Capturing Birsa Munda: The Virtuality of a Colonial-era Photograph", *Indian Folklore Research Journal*, 1.4 (2004), 53-68.

[22] See Select Committee Papers, IOR/L/PJ/6/1654 (British Library) and later tracts, such as Sarat Chandra Roy, "The Aborigines of Chotanagpur: Their Proper Status in the Reformed Constitution", *Man in India*, 26.2 (1946), 120-136.

[23] H. H. Risley, "Formation of the new Khunti sub-division and certain changes to the district of Ranchi" (26 September, 1906), IOR/l/PJ/6/778.3165 (British Library).

[24] Reforms Office, "Report", Government of India to Secretary of State (24 December, 1935), IOR/L/PJ/9/240 (British Library).

organisation in the region was imbued with historical depth.[25] It is the pictorial image, therefore, that needs to be situated within the historical matrix under consideration, as a means to understand Birsa's posthumous presence. Interestingly, this opens up the need to consider the visual and cultural effects of the portrait, in particular its devotional temper and its operation of intangible factors in respect of other Birsa-oriented activities, such as story-telling and the symbolic naming of sites, at the INC's session at Ramgarh (just north of Ranchi) in March 1940.[26]

Any re-drawing of Birsa's portrait to establish a national (rather than strictly 'tribal') devotee-divine relation could not have happened during the first phase *after* Birsa (1900-1912) as the image itself was then bound up, literally, in the colonial archive and therefore largely invisible. Rather, this relation came about as the INC sought to affirm its presence in and relevance to Jharkhand (then southern Bihar). After Birsa's photographic portrait was first published in 1912, see Figure 2,[27] opportunities arose for Birsa to acquire a new posthumous visibility raising important issues of cultural and historic interpretation. The photograph depicts Birsa as a captive. Even though some commentators have assumed that this image portrays a 'Sick Birsa', photographed at the time of the suppression of the *ulgulan*, i.e. after his capture and imprisonment in March 1900,[28] I speculate that it may pertain to a much earlier phase.

In September 1895, Birsa was held captive as a political visionary, rather than as a committed insurgent, and was very visibly put on trial at Khunti, near his Chalkad residence, having been charged with incitement. At this moment, Birsa assumed an efficacious visual form, becoming the focus of a highly politicised devotional interaction with his followers who wanted to join him as prisoners in Ranchi jail.[29] If the photograph dates from 1895, rather than 1900, one is able to see the captive figure afresh: (a) as an object of a devotional or Birsaite gaze, rather than solely as the trophy of an oppressive regime, and (b) as an embodiment of the subaltern worlds, through which the colonial penal technologies could be contested, for it was the Birsaite belief that the prisoner could and would transgress his containment.[30] Unlike the other photographs that Roy used to illustrate his historical ethnography, which were produced, patronised and/or preserved by various European missionaries in the region,[31] no provenance was provided either for this photographic portrait of Birsa or of a

Fig. 2: Anonymous, *Birsa Munda*, c. 1900, photograph, as republished in Roy (1912: 72); photograph courtesy of the author.

[25] P. K. Shukla, "The Adivasi Peasantry of Chotanagpur and the Nationalist Response (1920-1940s)", *Social Scientist*, 39.7 (2011), 55-64.

[26] Bhangya Bhukya, "Unmasking Nationalist and Marxist Constructions of Adivasi Uprising: An Exercise in Historical Reassembling", *Journal of Tribal Intellectual Collective India*, 2.3 (2015), 61-73.

[27] Sarat Chandra Roy, *The Mundas and their Country* (Calcutta: The Kuntaline Press, 1912), 72.

[28] Singh, *Dust-Storm*, 130.

[29] Ibid, 66-68.

[30] Ibid, 63.

[31] Roy, *The Mundas*, vii.

related fill-length image depicting 'Birsa Munda Captured and Conducted to Ranchi' (alongside three armed sepoys).[32]

Despite the uncertainties, concerning the timing of the photographic portrait, there is much visual evidence to support the contention that it became the source image for many later reproductions or 'liberations', including Maharathi's portrait.[33] As noted, this portrait was produced to coincide with the assembly of the INC in 1940. Redrawn as a figure of remembrance, this portrait located Birsa's legacy at the interface of (a) the future or young nation, i.e. India, as inhabited by prospective citizens or citizen-subjects (embodied by INC leaders, such as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi), (b) customary and tribal traditions, i.e. 'Munda country' or Chotanagpur, as inhabited by anthropological and minority subjects (embodied by Birsa), and (c) the evolution of ideational, philosophical and political currents in modern India, involving Mundas and non-Mundas and related sites of resistance, rupture and 'truth' (embodied by Maharathi *et al*, through the interplay of (a), (b) and (c)). It thereby prompted the question of how the bridging of the old and the new, or of the particular, i.e. the 'tribal' heritage, and the general, i.e. the 'national' future, could be taken up by scholars and activists to become a societal as well as an anthropological issue. Just as Maharathi's portrait brought Birsa visually into the folds of national devotion and national evolution, so Roy had anticipated such inter-cultural dynamics by highlighting as early as 1912 how the topic of human evolution was of shared interest to Munda, Hindu and anthropological communities.[34] As will be discussed, it is quite significant that Roy used the photograph of Birsa to illustrate 'ancient' rather than 'modern' Munda history.

The national ideal of integration, expressed in Indian anthropology via histories of inter-cultural exchange and in Indian society via human and social/cultural evolution, was advocated by some of Roy's and Maharathi's contemporaries, notably Brajendranath Seal and Radhakamal Mukerjee.[35] That the contemporary histories of India and Jharkhand could merge, and become simultaneously observable through the iconic figure of Birsa, suggests historical attention can also be brought to what Mukerjee termed 'intermediation': or the specifically Indian socio-political process of decentralised and morally-charged collectivisation, involving the integration of 'diverse social groups [such as tribal and village communities] and intermediate bodies'.[36] Whilst Mukerjee was primarily interested in documenting historic processes, he was also speaking to a community of social actors aware of the need to find, and then to demonstrate through their actions high levels of synergy between self and other, culture and politics, etc. Interestingly, the visual and conceptual transformations under consideration in this article are all expressions of the processes and patterns of intermediation that Mukerjee envisaged.

I contend that as intermediaries Roy and Maharathi brought about, at different times and in different ways, notable cultural transformations, for example:

1. of anthropology-into-politics (Roy), or culture-into-history;

[32] Roy, *The Mundas*, 342. This image accompanied Roy's retelling of the suppression of the *Ulgulan*. Like the portrait of 'Birsa Munda' (Roy, *The Mundas*, 72) that has been republished as 'Sick Birsa' (Singh, *Dust-Storm*, 130) this image was reworked and retitled as 'Captive Birsa' (Singh, *Dust-Storm*, 129).

[33] Rycroft, "Capturing". Also note the earlier point, concerning the ability of Maharathi's work to generate its own visual legacy.

[34] Roy, *The Mundas*, pp. 325-6.

[35] See Brajendranath Seal, "The Meaning of Race, Tribe and Nation", in G. Spiller, ed., *Papers on Inter-racial Problems* (London: P. S. King, 1911), 1-13; Radhakamal Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East: A Study in Comparative Politics* (London: P. S. King, 1923).

[36] Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East*, 77.

2. of observation-into-devotion (Maharathi), or photography-into-culture;
3. of past-into-present (Roy and Maharathi), or culture-into-heritage;
4. of humanity-into-divinity (Roy and Maharathi), or time-into-transcendence.

That these transformations were also reflected in the shifting parameters of Roy's own anthropological attitude and methodology suggests that his own oeuvre can be addressed in terms of intermediation. By the 1930s, Roy (1938) sought to revalidate India's own pre-modern anthropological knowledge, and to re-integrate 'the human' as a synthetic philosophical notion within anthropology. Initially subsuming these concerns within his ethnographic tracts, his 'Indian outlook' re-affirmed the potential of a holistic anthropological world-view to work as a political intervention. Here Roy aimed to highlight the equality of different cultures, and the cosmic 'soul' linking Indian anthropology, Adivasi peoples, and human civilisation together.[37] As noted by Dasgupta, by the 1930s Roy's production of an Indianised anthropology meant that his work broached 'the interstices of several cultures. His voice changed over time as he sought to capture [*sic*] the cultural heritage of the marginal societies'.[38] Roy's willingness to speak for Indian anthropology, which enabled him to locate Birsa and Birsaism afresh within an overtly 'national' or civilisational framework, as conjured by Mukerjee in terms of comparative politics and philosophical synthesis,[39] is therefore of immense interest. Not only did this shift parallel (and perhaps even prompt) the visual transformation of the Birsaite legacy, which involved Maharathi and the INC. It also enabled the anthropologist to return to the constructed relation of 'the Mundas' and dominant ideas concerning time, such as cultural and human evolution.

[37] Dasgupta, "Recasting the Oraons", 136, 161-2.

[38] Ibid., 136.

[39] Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East*, 80-86.

These issues have not hitherto featured in studies either of national visual culture or of the *ulgulan* of 1898-1900. Even as the initial photographic portrait apprehended Birsa as a visible entity, the visual reproductions of the portrait after his imprisonment and after his death point to the fact that they too could become re-used in broader struggles over power, knowledge and representation. As such, there are some interesting historical parallels and intersections between the cultural politics of the Birsa portrait, the anthropological history of 'the Mundas', and the administrative politics of Ranchi. Whilst these parallels and intersections could be emphasised, and indeed assessed in terms of the nationalisation of Birsa's political heritage, I aim now to locate the temporal dynamics that facilitated the transmission of such historical power. This is because these dynamics reveal how the colonial 'archive' became a national resource that, in its facilitation of spiritual and intellectual prospects, made Jharkhand's heritage-scape accessible and transmittable.

Insurgency and Integration

Following the release in 1912 of the first major ethno-history written by an Indian anthropologist of an Adivasi society, opportunities arose for the pro-Adivasi anthropological agenda to gain ground. Although only a few years had passed since the death of Birsa in Ranchi jail in June 1900 – following attacks on non-Birsaite institutions, people, and properties in and around Ranchi district in 1898-1900 – the administrative tide had turned in respect of the previous generation's neglect of Munda land rights.[40] The social critique that became prominent in this post-insurgency milieu directly informed the constitution of anthropological knowledge in the period under consideration.[41] Although such ideas would later be characterised in terms of a dichotomous discourse, of pro-Adivasi protectionism versus national assimilation, Maharathi's portrayal of the Bhagwan suggests that intangible features also came to prominence. These may be assessed in the light of what one might call Roy's anthropological spectrum, which ranged from the historical, the legal and the anthropological (1900-1912) to incorporate the transcendental, the cultural and the national (by the 1930s). If one considers the compelling shifts in Birsa-oriented historical interpretation, understanding, and consciousness that propelled certain forms of anti-colonial cultural nationalism amongst political elites in India, it becomes possible to think radically beyond the terms of the aforementioned dichotomy. This is because the nationalist discourse was not solely concerned with political assimilation, and the colonialist discourse included but was not defined by protectionist attitudes. Rather, it may be understood that both nationalists and colonialists contributed however unevenly to the 'integration' of Birsaism.

[40] Select Committee on the Amendment Bill, *Report*, 1903.

[41] See also Rabindranath Tagore, "The Problem of India", *The Modern Review*, 8.1 (1910), n. p.; Bipin Chandra Pal, "Race-Equality", *The Modern Review*, 9.4 (1911), 319-324.

Given their collective search for a national approach to 'tribal' heritage, the efforts of Roy, Mukerjee, *et al* prompted a prolonged and in many cases unresolved re-interpretation of 'the Mundas' and 'their country'.[42] Unlike colonial efforts that addressed Birsa as a dangerous leader, traced his involvement in the insurgency, and evaluated the divergences between pacifist and militant Birsaites, the new anthropology, as initially written by Roy (1912), broached the more widespread tenets of Munda ancestral heritage, territoriality, dispossession and political mobilisation. These different facets of Munda/Adivasi and subaltern history and culture engaged both distinct and overlapping temporal frameworks. It is important, therefore, to dwell on these for they point to how, for non-Adivasi intellectuals and activists, Birsa and the *ulgulan* became portals through which another past and another future could be absorbed within the national (as distinct from colonial) present.

[42] Also see Bijoy Chandra Mazumdar, *The Aborigines of the Highlands of Central India* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1927), 19-20, 49.

As noted, in 1912 Roy published the photographic portrait (Fig. 2) of the captive Birsa that was, in all likelihood, taken from a European missionary archive. Roy, however, used it to elaborate an early chapter on the 'traditional history' of the Mundas, i.e. the mass migrations towards the Chotanagpur region of Jharkhand in

the pre-colonial era, rather than the chapter on Birsa's contribution to the religious, social and political history of Jharkhand.[43] This more recent period was marked by dynamics of Hinduisation, Christianisation, inter-local landlordism, class-based tenancy struggles, and colonial governmentality.[44] In using the image to invoke early histories of Munda migration and notions of Munda heritage, Roy opened up other temporal horizons that could be suggested by Birsa, beyond those of the *ulgulan* and beyond that of the recent past.

[43] Roy, *The Mundas*, 27-60.

[44] Roy, *The Mundas*, 102-3.

In some ways, this slippage, or the shift in emphasis towards the pre-*ulgulan* past, could be seen to parallel the colonialists' attempts to justify their new approach to the administration of 'Munda country', via their belated attention to ancestral land holdings and related patterns of tenure. Yet I would contend that it also became possible, through Roy's conspicuously 'historical' and visual methodology, to read the figure in accordance with multiple and 'national', rather than distinctly colonial, registers of time. Of course, Birsa would then have been known primarily as the Munda rebel. Yet in administrative, legal and anthropological discourses, the temporal horizons embodied by 'the Mundas' were expressed both in relation to and beyond the contemporary. Included in Roy's section on early Munda history, Birsa became emblematic of the 'racial' facets of the so-called Kol (dark) civilisation that were harnessed in the ethno-history as a means of validating the idea of an indigenous, or what was then considered as a pre-Aryan, Munda society characterised by customary institutions, such as the Munda-Manki political system, and exemplified by present-day 'tribal' Mundas and their collective experience of dispossession.[45]

[45] Also see Roy, "Origin of the Kol Tribes".

This approach to racial or inter-racial representation can be contextualised. In respect of the critiques made by the likes of Bipin Chandra Pal at the time of the Universal Races Congress in 1911,[46] Brajendranath Seal also emerged as an important thinker. Seal and Pal rejected Eurocentric versions of what anti-racism should be, that is to say a 'universal' civilisation that would herald a new phase of western cultural hegemony. Rather they favoured ideas of inter-cultural and 'national' integration and inter-racial unification, which were seen as civilisational processes that belonged to or grew from India's collective human experience. I have addressed Maharathi's portrait and, more broadly, the periods *after* Birsa in line with these ideas. As a contemporary of Roy, Seal's philosophies of 'race' and human evolution filtered into debates on inter-racial understanding, 'Indian' anthropology, and anti-racism. *The Modern Review*, for example, at times encouraged contributors to stand apart from the 'dangerous experiment', or the new 'universalism', of (anti-)racist western anthropologists.[47] Interestingly, it was in these pages that Roy first articulated his initial views on Munda history and collectivism. His later, and self-consciously nationalist/humanist alignment of Birsa to the 'racial', inter-racial and inter-cultural heritages of India therefore becomes intriguing.

[46] Bipin Chandra Pal, "The Problem of Race-Sympathy: The Universal Races Congress", *The Modern Review*, 10.2 (1911), 60-64.

[47] Pal, "The Problem", 62; "Contemporary Thought and Life", *The Modern Review*, 10.3 (1911), 275-281.

Although 'racial' thinking very much was in force, especially within the

colonialist and missionary imagination, its relevance to leading exponents of 'Indian' anthropology or 'Hindu' sociology, such as Roy, Mukerjee, or Seal, was more nuanced. In these emergent epistemologies, racial difference and the prospects for inter-racial justice and coexistence were key ideas that would, in part, define the moral positioning and social efficacy of 'Indian' knowledge, then defined as something than could elevate one's political and ethical being *vis-à-vis* European, western and/or colonial epistemology.[48] Even though he was conspicuously 'universal' in his approach, Seal conceptualised the future of India's human heritage in terms that brought a Vedanta-inspired humanism into a direct relationship with the 'national race', described as the relation of the present to the future, and the 'cultural race', envisaged as the relation of the present to the past.[49] Mukerjee, a committed follower of Seal and, like Roy, an exponent of neo-Vedanta, applied this thinking to the reconstruction of the new 'social body', deemed to be evolving in India via intermediation. He advocated 'politico-genesis' at local, regional, national and international levels as a means to extend and surpass debates on ethno-genesis.[50]

[48] See Dasgupta, "Recasting the Oraons",158-9, on Roy's social evolutionist representations of 'the Oraons', whose village-level democracy confirmed India's own progressive civilisation.

[49] Seal, "The Meaning", 9-11; Pal, "Contemporary Thought", 277.

[50] Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East*, 22-3.

It may be noted that in the years immediately following Roy's wave of Munda-related publications, Mukerjee began to re-inscribe the idea of Munda self-rule and other aspects of Adivasi political heritage: 'The Manki [Munda headman] is an essential factor in the original political organisation of Munda races [that included 'the Mundas', as a tribal society] and as such has existed everywhere among them'.[51] According to Mukerjee, the reconstitution of India's village-level polities pertained to Adivasis in terms of their 'systems of agrarian distribution and settlement, and tribal government'.[52] Even though these systems focused on the lived experiences of Bhil, Santal, Munda, Oraon, Ho, Maria and other Adivasis, the inclusive/integrative agenda of the national episteme meant that these decentralised entities (and the pathways to autonomy that they seemingly signified) could be recast in terms of India's collective history, culture, civilisation, heritage, and modernity.

[51] Radhakamal Mukerjee, "Race Elements in the Indian Village Constitution", *Man in India*, 3.1 (1923), 3.

[52] Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East*, 2.

So, rather than treating these post-*ulgulan* intellectual and social dynamics as evidence of cross-cultural appropriation, of national elitism or of 'Hindu' chauvinism, it is of analytical value to address the journeying of 'Birsa Munda' and, to a lesser extent, of the 'Birsaites' (as absent witnesses) into and out of new epistemological sites. For in the wake of the colonial suppression of the *ulgulan*, and in association with the anthropological fieldwork of Roy, new levels of administrative and scholarly attention were afforded to the ancestral heritage of some Munda groups. Interestingly, these new epistemological and utopian sites sometimes cross-referred to the colonial archive, either directly as per Roy (1912) or indirectly as per Maharathi.

In 1903, as it attempted to rediscover its moral and administrative purpose, the colonial administration reassessed the precise locations of 'Mundari Khunt-kattidar' holdings, as these were deemed to have pertained to the direct

descendants of the original Adivasi cultivators in the Ranchi region.[53] The Munda concept of patrilineal descent was taken by colonialists as evidence of the region's 'aboriginal' identity, which itself was both lost and found at the time of the *ulgulan*. Importantly, Roy became one of the administration's legal advisors in this phase and, in this capacity, he generated a series of recommendations that were aligned to those of other consultants.[54] Relating closely to sites and experiences of insurgency and counter-insurgency, Roy's dual identity as legal representative and anthropological researcher connected with both the administrative archive and the national public sphere. The Munda-oriented archive, which was given form by colonialists in Ranchi and Calcutta and by nationalist writers and editors, may be considered in real and also in more metaphorical terms. For it was Roy who, in the post-insurgency phase, would act as the conduit between 'the Mundas', the real colonial archive, and Birsa's more immaterial afterlife.

In real terms, the colonial archive comprised documents that highlighted the various issues that administrators and their informants faced in locating and capturing Birsa, quelling other leaders and their followers, and legitimating various administrative, legal and military measures.[55] Given Roy's direct contribution to the post-*ulgulan* administrative effort, his anthropological knowledge might be seen to sit cosily within this colonialist matrix. Yet if one addresses the administrative archive with a more nuanced attitude, which couples the notion of administrative memory with the retrieval/contestation of archival entities in national arenas, it becomes impossible to think only in terms of real or material archives.

As a means of generating some conclusions and further research questions, the *metaphorical* archive is here defined in terms of the porous boundaries of the archive, that is to say the ongoing tension between the reality of the archive as a closed entity (that usually privileges its production and usage in the past) and the prospect of the archive as a site of release, liberation, or future empowerment. Similar notions have been addressed by other historians and anthropologists in terms of autonomous, radical and utopian archives.[56] Roy and his early work on 'the Mundas' fits uneasily between the real and utopian archives. His work, particularly his dissemination of the portrait of Birsa, reveals how the colonial archive can also be addressed via its transformation and the resultant hold, on some facets of the national imagination, of archival time. For in this more intangible arena, the liberated archive engendered new intersections between Munda (tribal), national (anthropological) and humanist (as well as transcendental) ideas of power and truth. These post-archival relations, characteristic of 'Indian' anthropology in this pre-Independence phase, were less about specific bodies of materials, images or information, or even attitudes of preservation and control. Rather they propelled new temporal dynamics, which acquired intercultural significance through their ability to translate or indeed recreate the archive-as-social.

[53] Select Committee on the Amendment Bill, *Report*, 1903. Also refer to the use Edward Cadogan's report on India's 'aboriginal' areas to inform the future status of EAs and PEAs: Reforms Office, *Report*, Government of India to Secretary of State, 24 December 1935, IOR/L/PJ/9/240 (British Library).

[54] Select Committee Papers, *Opinions on the Chotanagpur (Amendment) Bill* (n. d., c. 1905), IOR/L/PJ/6/1654.1237 (British Library).

[55] See, for example, C. W. Bolton, "Letter", to Secretary of the Government of India (10 January 1900); and A. Forbes, "Report II", Camp Khunti (12 January 1900), IOR/L/PJ/6/531 (British Library).

[56] S. Moore and S. Pell, "Autonomous Archives", *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 16.4-5 (2010), 255-268; David Zeitlyn, "Anthropology in and of the Archives: Possible Futures and Contingent Pasts", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41 (2012), 461-80.

Conclusions: Archives in Transition

In anthropological and archival terms, the politics-of-time in the phases after the *ulgulan* encompassed (a) the belated colonial recognition of ancestral Munda settlements, (b) the first anthropological attempts to knit Adivasi resistance into the fabric of both tribal (particular) and national (inter-ethnic) heritages, and (c) subsequent practices of visual remembrance and social reconstruction. The concept of archival time can here be engaged primarily via 'heritage politics' and their national value:[57] the opportunity established through 'Hindu' sociology or 'Indian' anthropology for non-Adivasis to inhabit a timeframe or temporally-defined dynamic that could be shared with Adivasis, real or imagined, insurgent or otherwise. As Birsa's legacy became mobile, and reproducible across differing social and conceptual terrains, the national efficacy of the *ulgulan* was established and, indeed, could potentially be re-embodied.

This concept of coexistence pertained to the re-charting or the re-imagining of the national future in ways that provided a heightened visibility for the convergence of quite distinct subaltern and civilisational idioms: notably 'insurgent' (historic/political) and 'dharmic' (transcendental/cultural) time. Through this convergence, other boundaries became collapsible between, for example, the 'tribal'/the Hindu, rebellion/social order, the visual/the historical, the future/the past, and so on to the extent that the convergences acquired their own cultural value. Maharathi's portrait and Roy's 'Indian Outlook' (1938) demonstrated a broader national revitalisation of the cultural heritage of southern Bihar, in terms of 'great' personages, such as Birsa. Via Maharathi's sensitive artwork, Birsa became visible in ways that made him comparable, for example, to the Buddha who was another of Maharathi's Bihar-based muses. Informed by broader political philosophies of economic, artistic, intellectual and cultural self-reliance, Maharathi's invocation of the region's spiritual leaders sustained a pluralistic heritage, of unity-in-diversity. This heritage focused on spiritual cultures of devotion, and was updated by the likes of Maharathi. His portrait, one part of the Jharkhandi *pandal* (temporary pavilion), redrew the temporal coordinates of this heritage by enabling its users to switch seamlessly between Adivasi pasts and national futures, as if finding their own terms of intermediation and thereby generating their own 'presence'.

In their invocation of this elevated and moralised cultural plane that heralded a 'comprehensive consciousness',[58] Maharathi as well as Roy defined a new kind of anthropological aesthetic for young India. This was premised on the joint apprehension of (a) insurgent/post-insurgent time and (b) historical/utopian horizons of national freedom. Within this dialogic experience, (a) 'rebel time', or the radicalisation of ancestral pasts and autonomous futures by insurgents in the present, and (b) 'heritage time', or the invocation of civilisational identities and values, came to coalesce in such a way that their mutuality confirmed the modern

[57] Michael Rowlands and Ferdinand de Jong, "Reconsidering Heritage and Memory", in F. de Jong and M. Rowlands, eds., *Reclaiming Heritage: Alternative Imaginaries of Memory in West Africa* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2007), 13-29.

[58] Citing Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East*, 157; see also R. Prasad, "General Introduction", in R. Prasad, ed., *A Historical-Developmental Study of Classical Indian Philosophy of Morals* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 2009), 1-12, citing 6.

(temporal) and regional (locational) dynamics of Munda/Adivasi heritage. Whereas Roy de-archived Birsa according to a conspicuously anthropological agenda, Maharathi's addition of a more transcendental layer fostered a new kind of anthropological 'dharma'. It created opportunities for viewers to engage a visual experience that functioned both as a historical memory and as a social/ethical commitment.[59] This new way of seeing Birsa harmonised the past with the present (and future) to contradict the linearity and epistemic violence of colonial time, which rendered Birsa criminal and Munda pasts archival. Maharathi's de-archiving attitude also served the purpose of de-criminalising the prophet and nationalising Birsa's posthumous role as a guide pointing metaphorically towards what Mukerjee claimed was 'democracy in the East'. Maharathi's artistic creativity thus engendered a complex representational history, through which the entanglement of mainstream (and anthropological) and subaltern (and 'tribal') experiences of time would create new possibilities for inter-cultural recognition and socio-political reconstruction.

I have shown how Roy anticipated such notions in his early work. In 1912, for example, he had complicated the notion of a pre-*ulgulan* Munda heritage, by locating Mundas, and Birsa in particular, within overtly 'tribal' and what were then considered as conspicuously universal, human, or 'national' evolutionary flows. Even if a full appreciation of Birsa's cultural resonance had yet to be established, by 1912 the so-called Munda 'fanatic' had become writable and visible across and between administrative and anthropological cultures, and within both contemporary (linear) and deep (non-linear) time. His 'historic' persona thereby presented subsequent users and interpreters of his image, notably Maharathi, with a plethora of political, temporal and aesthetic possibilities. I have elaborated many of these above, largely in historical and conceptual terms, with a view to rethinking the era *after* Birsa.

[59] On the ethical aspects of *dharma* in sociology and in society, see Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East*, 157.

Amit Prakash, Imran Amin, Rukmani, Elida K. U. Jacobsen

Homogenising Discourses of Governance. Identity and Autonomy in Jharkhand[1]

Abstract: There is a great degree of discursive coherence about norms and principles of democratic governance, framed as they are in a global context of an ideational framework of a liberal state, premised on the rights of the individual. The local reality on the other hand is often premised on 'dissonant' construct of group identities. This article engages with the central challenge of liberal theory of reconciling rights of the individual with those asserted by highly articulate group identities. In the case of India, a large degree of political contestation is premised on the politics of identity leading to demands for autonomy. Thus, the local reality appears to have very little correspondence with the principles of democracy framed globally. In addition, most demands for recognition of identity and autonomy have to interact and internalise another global discourse – that of development. The article argues, with reference to Adivasi identity in Jharkhand, that politically articulate groups interact with both of these 'homogenising' discourses which are a derivative national identity of the state and that of development. In this process, the sub-national identities are able to articulate an Adivasi identity that is located in the global discourse, but at the same time is peculiarly local.

Keywords: *governance*, *gram panchayat*, *Jharkhand*, *Naxal*, *PRI*,

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Introduction

Interaction between various versions of central authority of India and the tribals of its mainland, since colonial times, has been the source of successive waves of violent social movement. These 'tribal uprisings' of the pre-independence era, as well as the 'tribal unrests' of post-colonial times, have largely been examined as isolated interactions between the state and the tribals at different points of time in history. Few have examined such organised resistance to tribal policies as part of an assemblage of the larger, modern processes of governing introduced by the 'enlightened' colonial masters. Each wave of resistance has informed subsequent policies for governing society – of which the tribal forms a very distinct category – in the name of security, development and social justice. This article studies the dialectical evolution of the state's attempts to govern the resistant world of the tribal in central India by exploring and elaborating upon the discourse of governance.

'Governance', used to denote processes of governing within and beyond the state, has gained increasing currency over the past two decade. It is a reflexive attempt to develop institutional mechanism to organise public life towards socially just and inclusive development while being participatory. Thus it involves the manipulation of the existing power relations in society in order to facilitate the desired or pursued conduct by various social actors, including and especially, but

not exclusively, of the state. However, like any institutional mechanism and the resultant distribution of power in society, governance needs to be legitimised by principles like freedom, equality, inclusiveness, and, empowerment. This requires a body of knowledge that informs the practice of governance in order to enhance its capabilities and address its pathologies so as to empower the subjects of governance, i.e., citizens, the locus of freedom and equality. This knowledge-power continuum or discourse establishes, sustains and transforms power relations in society. Therefore, any understanding of the discourse of governance has to not only delineate the knowledge-power continuum that establishes and sustains any institution, but also highlight the scope of political negotiation and contestation therein. It is this dialectical interaction between the imposition of the discourse of governance and its political contestation of operationalisation that is the focus of this article.

With such an understanding of discourse of governance, this article explores the consensus, contestation and the contested consensus of the discourse of governance in India. It identifies three dominant threads in the Indian discourse of governance: security of the state, participatory/democratic, and thereby, inclusive development, and concerns of social justice. Having identified these threads, it traces their constitution in colonial period, its contestation by the nationalist and the emerging consensus of post-colonial India. The article also elaborates mechanisms through which such consensus is contested over the 1970s and 1980s, leading to the contemporary contested consensus. The contested consensus of present times is characterised by a general agreement on the objectives toward which public affairs in organised, but democratic, electoral politics allows for sufficient contestation of the institutional mechanism for achieving such goals. Finally, the concluding part highlights the negotiation with the objective as well as institutional mechanism of this discourse.

Conceptual Scope and Contextual Background

Contemporary debates on governance challenge the long-standing focus of social sciences on the most efficacious and technocratically superior mechanism for orderly social change and speedy 'development'. It acknowledges the centrality of the socioeconomic and political context and contestations in the processes of policy implementation.[2] It has been argued that governance pertains to organising public affairs to ensure democratic economic growth and institutional mechanisms to achieve it. Contestations, on the other hand, have focused on the relationship between democracy and development and the role of state therein amidst pluralisation of actors as well as levels of governance.[3] Because of the complex relationship between democracy and development and the state's role as an anchor for citizens' rights and social justice, governance is legitimised by a knowledge-power continuum that establishes, sustains and/or transforms power relations in society.

[2] World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth. A Long Term Perspective Study* (Washington DC: World Bank, 1989).

[3] Amit Prakash, "Governance, Governmentality and the Study of Conflicts", in Janel B. Galvanek, Hans J. Giessmann and Mir Mubashir, eds., *Norms and Premises of Peace Governance: Socio-Cultural Commonalities and Differences in Europe and India* (Berlin: Berghof Foundation, 2012), 52.

This knowledge-power continuum or discourse relies on 'voluntarism and participation' to maintain the 'necessary degree of ideological unity' required for securing consent,[4] and produces 'the subject of rule' by assigning them capabilities and pathologies.[5] However, these subjective positions are 'negotiated with, embraced, adapted or discarded'[6] and politicised as collective identities based on "relation of equivalence between [various marginalised] subject positions".[7] This politicisation creates the scope for pluralist political actions[8] carried out in the name of social justice, involving recognition and representation of all in redistribution of resources, with 'participation parity' as its normative core.[9]

Discourses of governance therefore, denote a process by which a governmental knowledge-power continuum establishes, sustains and transforms power relations in a society. It involves a continuous process mediated by its institutional location and mechanism, the subjective positions it creates and the scope for pluralised political activity and resistance that it offers. In this light, the article looks at the evolution and dialectics of what started as the enlightened colonial project to understand India through detailed knowledge for 'technical control'. The colonial enterprise started with "economic reforms... rights based liberal discourse, bureaucratic language of English and a system of education"[10] secured by a centralised police force.[11] The nationalist challenge, while conceding the superiority of the colonial discourse in material/public realm, forged its distinctiveness in the spiritual/private realm. This derivative discourse forced Indian self-identity to follow and emulate the social values and organisation of an alien culture.[12] Herein lie the inherent dialectic of Indian discourse of governance as to how "a resolutely modern, secular and developmental centre is established in the face of a partially tradition and parochial forms of politics in the periphery".[13]

Contemporary Discourses of Governance in India

In India, democratic governance through liberal institutions was not the outcome of class conflicts since popular democracy preceded the rise of liberal institutions.[14] Similarly, technologies of governmentality in India predate the rise of the modern state. Therefore, the resultant discourse was not the prerogative of technocratic elite, but was a highly contested political issue[15] involving "politics emerging out of the development policies of the state".[16] Therefore, securing the welfare of various categories of people, irrespective of their participation, has been the default rationality of governance in India. Furthermore, in the resource-contested political economy of India, the question of development is central to political mobilisation and contestation between various politically-active groups. Hence, while use of state power to empower the weaker section is seen as legitimate developmental politics, increasing political competition makes it "difficult for a democratically elected government to implement redistributive policies".[17] Furthermore, proportional representation of social groups and/or communities in the public and private

[4] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, trans. Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 328.

[5] Nikolas Rose, "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies", in Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta, eds., *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2006), 159.

[6] Jonathan Xavier India, "Analytics of the Modern: An Introduction", in Jonathan Xavier Inda, ed., *Anthropologies of Modernity: Foucault, Governmentality, and Life Politics* (Maiden: Blackwell, 2005), 11.

[7] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), 128-40.

[8] Rosemary J. Coombe, "The Work of Rights at the Limits of Governmentality", *Anthropologica,* 49.2 (2007), 286.

[9] Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political Philosophical Exchange*, trans. by Joel Golb, James Ingram and Christiane Wale (London: Verso, 2003), 68-69.

[10] Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (London: Hamish and Hamilton, 1997), 23.

[11] Amit Prakash, "The Policing Functions of the Indian State", in Ajay K. Mehra and René Lévy, eds., *The Police, State and Society: Perspectives from India and France* (New Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2011), 90.

[12] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton U. P. 1993), chs. 2 and 3.

[13] Pratap Bhanu Mehta, "India's Disordered Democracy", *Pacific Affairs*, 64, (Winter, 1991/92), 539.

[14] Subrata K. Mitra, *The Puzzle of India's Governance: Culture, Context and Comparative Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 8.

[15] Subrata K. Mitra, *Power, Politics and Participation: Local Elites and the Politics of Development in India* (London: Routledge, 2002), 12-13.

[16] Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflection on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia U. P., 2004), 40.

[17] Sudha Pai, *Developmental State and the Dalit Question in Madhya Pradesh: Congress Response* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010), 481.

sphere is advocated.[18]

Thus, the two quests – that of identity recognition and that of socio-economic change – have become inextricably intertwined. The claims of universality of the development discourse and poverty reduction schemes have been contested by claims of differentiated notions of development outcomes, premised on politics of recognition as the route to development. This led to contestations over production of 'poverty' and the 'poor' as well as its policy redressal in terms of assumptions about the capacities of state agencies, the voluntary sector, and poorer individuals, groups and communities such as the tribal population.[19] The democratic process further generates a fair degree of disagreements and contests. However, such contests do not undermine the discursive consensus, but strengthen it. This is on account of two factors: (a) the contests and disagreements are focused largely on the governmental techniques and modalities of public policy and do not interrogate the premises of the consensus itself; and, (b) the constitutive features of the discursive consensus have always been plural and contradictory which imparts strength to the consensus instead of weakening it.[20]

The complex ideational foundations and even more complex political process in the context of rapid socio-economic changes have generated multiple discursive threads and structures in India. This article shows that the contemporary political processes point to three intertwined, but distinct dominant threads: security of the state; democracy and development; and, recognition-redistribution continuum of social justice. Also, there is a broad discursive consensus across political actors with respect to the basic premises of democratic governance in India. However, this general consensus on a top-down approach notwithstanding, the negotiation with this consensus takes place at the level of practice of these remedies.

We explore these negotiations by looking at the discourse of governance adopted to deal with Left-wing Maoist extremism or Naxalism, as it is known in India. The choice of this particular dimension is based on certain key rationales. First, the Naxal threat effects majority of the states of mainland India, excluding Jammu and Kashmir and the North Eastern states, with violent activities being reported from 16 of 20 states. That is why, and rightly so, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) as well as the Prime Minister recognises it as the single largest threat to internal security. Further, this threat specially targets the democratic and developmental discourse of India in the name of social justice. This is reflected in how the threat is being perceived by the state, as reflected in the annual report of MHA since 2003, as being embedded in socio-economic factors like unemployment, poverty, social injustice and institutional vacuum at the grassroots level as the root cause. The fact that this challenge has been violent undermines the basic premise of the Indian state's power – its legitimate monopoly over means of violence – further underlines its importance. Thus, apart from being widespread, the Naxal issue also covers the three broad thematics of Indian discourse: that of security, democratic development and social justice. The default response continues to be

[18] Kurmana Simha Chalam, *Caste Based Reservation and Human Development in India* (New Delhi: Sage, 2007), 180.

[19] Stuart Corbridge et al., *Seeing the State: Governance and Governmentality in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 2005), 47-52.

[20] Prakash, "Governance, Governmentality".

the strengthening of the security apparatus. It is only as a complementary package that increased allocation of developmental funds becomes a governmental response.

It is within the above constitutive logic that the contemporary discourses on governance are embedded. What follows delineates the three thematics of governance discourse in India and their historical constitution in India, as well as their particular manifestation in the tribal regions of the state of Jharkhand. The empirical material is derived from both, primary and secondary sources, including academic writings, parliamentary debates, party political articulations, and, a set of semi-structured interviews conducted during the field study in select districts of Jharkhand and Bihar in 2011 and 2012.

The reason for choosing Bihar and Jharkhand, apart from their history, had to do with the fact that as per 2006 MHA categorisation of the 33 worst Naxal-affected regions, 16 were in these two states: six districts in Bihar and ten in Jharkhand. Accordingly, two districts from Bihar and three from Jharkhand were selected for purposive sampling so that they represent the diversity of these two states in terms of size, population, share of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) population, urbanisation and literacy rates. After visiting these district headquarters and doing a pilot study, snowball sampling method was followed by choosing one block and two *gram panchayats* in each district that have experienced Naxal violence in the current wave of the 21st century. Sites like block development office, local police station, health department, schools, *panchayat* offices and market places were primary locations for interviews and group discussions with key informants and local populace. These were sites of institutional materialisation where every day practices of developmental governance were enacted and negotiated.

1. *Raison d'etat*: Internal Security

Colonial concerns of 'security of the realm' had shaped the Police Act, 1861, legislated after the 1857 Mutiny to establish a suitable police force for crushing resistance to the state. Ever since the discursive consensus over security has seen almost no change except for redistribution of police administration in favour of a strong Centre. However, there were regional variations in these universal policing functions. In the tribal world of Jharkhand, initial colonial efforts at establishing centralised administration in the region saw a series of agrarian revolts.[21] Even though the region had limited financial viability, it was critical for maintaining martial peace around Calcutta and for protection of the Grand Trunk Road to Delhi and the Jackson Road to Bombay.[22] Therefore, each of the subsequent revolts was followed by colonial legislations to redress the grievances around which these tribal mobilisations were centred.[23] As a result, colonial conquest and control of the Jharkhand region through the 19th century was attained by the actual exercise and

[21] For details see Nirmal Sengupta, "Class and Tribe in Jharkhand", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15.14 (1980), 664-671; Sussana B. C. Devalle, *Discourses of Ethnicity: Culture and Protest in Jharkhand* (New Delhi: Sage, 1992); Purushottam Kumar, *History and Administration of Tribal Chotanagpur (Jharkhand)* (Delhi: Atma Ram & Sons., 1994).

[22] Kumar, *History and Administration,* 33.

[23] Alpa Shah, *In the Shadows of the State: Indigenous Politics, Environmentalism and Insurgency in Jharkhand, India* (Durham, NC: Duke U. P., 2010), 14-15.

permanent threat of force.[24]

After Independence, Constituent Assembly debates focused on three contradictory concerns of internal security: public order and rights of citizen; strong Union and the autonomy of the states; and, the provision concerning 'emergency'.[25] There was a consensus in the Constituent Assembly, for restrictions on the Right to Freedom of citizens on grounds of "sedition or any other matter which ... undermines the authority or foundation of the state", and "in the interests of the public order".[26] Similarly, on the issue of special responsibility of the Union government *vis-à-vis* internal security and defending the Union, the consensus was for a strong centre.[27] The Constituent Assembly accepted the need to place upon the Union government a higher responsibility which could override provincial autonomy in case peace was gravely threatened. This would not curtail the provincial legislative powers, but Union laws prevail in case of a clash.[28] The main contours of the consensus were clearly evident as the Union government had the duty "to protect every state against external aggression and internal disturbance and ensure that the government of every state is carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution".[29] Further, Union enactments prevail over state laws with respect to the policing framework and exercise of executive power. Non-compliance was to be seen as 'breakdown of the constitutional machinery' – a ground for imposition of President's rule. There was no serious challenge to this consensus on account of the continuing unsettled political situation in the country as also the dominance of the 'Congress system'.[30]

In case of the tribal lands of Jharkhand, agrarian protests of the 19th century were replaced by the urbanised issue of autonomy through separate state within the India Union as the key concern of popular mobilisation for the Jharkhand Movement.[31] In 1928, the first demand for a separate administrative unit in Chotanagpur placed before the Simon Commission was rejected and the Government of India Act 1935 declared Chotanagpur and Santal Pargana as Partially Excluded Areas. After Independence, with the constitution of State Reorganisation Commission (SRC), hopes of a separate state were revived, but with SRC's exclusive prioritisation of the linguistic criteria in the reorganisation of states led to the rejection of the demand. This short revival of hope for a separate state saw tribal electoral parties such as Jaipal Singh-led Jharkhand Party making significant electoral gains in the 1950s. However, with rejection of the demand, electoral mobilisation shifted to radical forms over the course of the 1960s.[32]

In the 1960s, with the revival of a plethora of mass-based popular mobilisation across India, the consensus on the centralised force began eroding. The *suo motu* deployment of Union armed forces in states without their consent became a matter of intense protests.[33] However, little has been done to institutionalise the contestations articulated by the states, who jealously defend their autonomy in policing, but have demonstrated a quick willingness to enforce the same security-oriented paradigm of governance. Thus, the dominance of the consensus

[24] Devalle, *Discourses of Ethnicity,* 68-70.

[25] Prakash, "The Policing Functions", 90.

[26] B. Shiva Rao, *The Framing of India's Constitution: A Study* (Bombay: Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1968), 218.

[27] *Constituent Assembly Debates*, Vol. 1 (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1968), 64-103.

[28] Rao, *The Framing of India's Constitution*, 546.

[29] *Constitution of India*, Ministry of Law and Justice (New Delhi: Government of India, 2007), Article 355.

[30] Rajni Kothari, "The Congress 'System' in India", *Asian Survey*, 4.12 (1964), 1161-1173.

[31] Devalle, *Discourses of Ethnicity,* 150-52. Also see Amit Prakash, *Jharkhand: Politics of Development and Identity* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2001).

[32] Prakash, *Jharkhand*, 50-51, 98-109.

[33] See Government of West Bengal, *Memorandum on Centre-State Relations*, (Calcutta: Government of West Bengal, 1987); Amit Prakash, "The Democratic Story of Twin Challenges to Governance: Identity Needs and Developmental Need", in Ranabir Samaddar and Suhit K. Sen, eds., *New Subjects and New Governance in India* (Delhi: Routledge, 2012).

concerning the defence of the realm from all threats has led to a host of 'temporary' extraordinary legislations such as the Preventive Detention Act (1950), National Security Act (1980), Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (1958) and the Prevention of Terrorism Act of 2002 (POTA) − all repeatedly upheld by the judiciary.

In the context of Jharkhand, popular uprisings of the 1970s saw the state's repression of direct peasant actions of forcible harvesting, colliery workers mobilisation, and struggles of the Kurmi peasantry against land alienation.[34] The mass movement became the target of state repression as the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Bihar Military Police and Bihar Armed Police were given a free hand.[35] As a result, violence became a legitimate tactics of self-defence for the dominant section of society and perpetuated fear as an 'autonomous force', embedded in the process of socialisation.[36] However, by the late 1970s the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) was introduced to increase flow of developmental funds and to co-opt the tribal leadership and thereby demobilise the masses.

The discursive consensus that emerged in the transition to the 21st century shows the continued dominance of this security paradigm, with a shift away from territorial integrity to internal security. Internal security has been on the agenda of Congress Party (INC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for some time and the Left parties[37] have also recently acquiesced. In this securitisation the state, Universal Citizen Identity (UID) is offered as the magic bullet for "[enhancing] national security and countering illegal immigration".[38] In the parliamentary debates, important thematics on internal security include: internal security, cross-border terrorism across urban India and in Jammu and Kashmir; Bangladeshi and indigenous insurgents of the North East and Maoist/Naxal/Left-wing extremists across mainland India.

Naxalism emerged in Jharkhand for the first time in the 1970s and was the primary security concern in the region. Scholars have rightly argued that during the 1990s, Naxal had shifted to mountainous, tribal areas of central and eastern India where there was still limited projection of state's disciplinary power.[39] The formation of CPI (Maoist) in 2004 benefited from a large hinterland conducive to guerrilla warfare amidst rugged terrain.[40] This led to a rapid expansion in their territorial spread across central and eastern India. The Union government took note of increasing attacks on government and private properties, especially, railway and police property, and of massive militarisation drive by Naxals.[41] It also acknowledged that this was due to institutional vacuum created by functional inadequacies of grassroots governance structures, prevalent dissatisfaction, and perceived neglect and injustice among the marginalised tribal population in these Naxal-affected areas.[42]

In response, the Central Government adopted 'a multi-pronged strategy' that included better-trained police force, focused attention on development and public grievances redressal. After initial experimentation with peace talks and local

[34] Devalle, *Discourses of Ethnicity,* 103-04, 183-85; Prakash, *Jharkhand*, 119.

[35] EPW, "Exploitation, Protest and Repression", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14.22 (1979), 940-943. Also see Devalle, *Discourses of Ethnicity,* 101-03, 142; Prakash, *Jharkhand*, 120.

[36] Devalle, *Discourses of Ethnicity,* 197-98, 209.

[37] Left parties in India are comprised of a cluster of leftist parties, many of which have little electoral relevance. Hence, articulations of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which is electorally most significant, have been analysed here as the representative the Leftist political opinion.

[38] Anon., "Unique Identification Project will help in improving security", *The Hindu*, Chennai, June 23, 2010.

[39] J. Kennedy and S. Purushotham, "Beyond Naxalbari: A Comparative Analysis of Maoist Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Independent India", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 54.4 (2012), 851-52; Alpa Shah, "The Intimacy of Insurgency: Beyond Coercion, Greed or Grievance in Maoist India", *Economy and Society*, 42.3 (2013) 480-506.

[40] Stuart Corbridge, John Harriss, and Craig Jeffrey, *India Today: Economy, Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 201.

[41] Ministry of Home Affairs, *Annual Report 2003-04* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2004), 24.

[42] Ministry of Home Affairs, *Annual Report 2004-05 - 2012-13* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2013). Also see T. D. Gupta, "Maoism in India: Ideology, Programme and Armed Struggle", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41.29 (2006), 3172.

resistance mobilisation, from 2006 onwards the government undertook massive deployment of paramilitary battalion and specially-trained forces in these areas. It also pumped in huge volumes of developmental funds, taken up in the next section.[43] However, the Indian state reports degrees of Naxal affectedness of various districts without giving any detail regarding the parameters of intensities of impact. And police capacity and ratio *vis-à-vis* population continues to remain abysmal across all the major Maoist-affected states.[44] Further, any governmental 'squeeze' on a particular area leads to escalation of violence in other regions and the tactical withdrawal of the Maoist leadership and forces from the area under squeeze.[45] To add to these, Naxals have made innovative reflexive strategies to change from guerrilla warfare to mobile warfare to extend the operational zone to newer areas and build an interface for mass movements around issues of land and Special Economic Zones (SEZ) to acquire influence in local agenda setting.[46]

At the same, amidst the dominant governance deficit thesis, Maoists have paralysed state capacity while building a criminal economy, based on "a predatory financial base through demonstrative use of violence." This gives structural effects of "parasitic shadow state, feeding off benefits provided by the formal state structure while simultaneously using these to undermine the state".[47] Their spread into mineral-rich central India has opened mines as cash registers for a loose militia confederation with money-minded local elites. In this pursuit, they have struck deals with businesses houses, extracted party funds from labourers, imposed 'levies' on local sellers, and, extorted contributions from schools.[48] Maoists also extract protection fees from local bureaucrats and appropriate government-provided development funds from private contractors.[49] This shadow economy was estimated to be 25 billion Rupees (approximately, US$552 million) in 2010 alone.[50]

The local practice of Naxal outfits and the security apparatus of the state at the grassroots level reveal these ignored aspects of the Naxal threat. The empirical evidence from the field suggests that the security discourse of the state fails to adequately engage with the ground level dynamic. It ignores the complex interaction for negotiated consensus between local elite, the Panchayati Raj institutions (PRI) representatives, and the Naxals – including officials, in some cases. A police official and a Naxal sympathiser, both point to the complex relation between "the politician, contractor/businessman, and Naxals; and also to the role that intermediaries play in facilitating these interactions".[51] It is this complex relationship that sustains the levy-economy, which facilitates Naxal operations in the region. Furthermore, as the deputy commandant of a specialised CPRF battalion elaborates: "the excessive use of paramilitary forces limits the scope for development of the local police force, which is central for security from the Naxal threat".[52]

[43] Ministry of Home Affairs, *Annual Report 2004-05 - 2012-13*.

[44] Ajai Sahni, "Jharkhand: Paralysis and Drift", *South Asia Intelligence Review*, 6.8 (September 2007).

[45] Ajai Sahni, "Left Wing Extremism in India: Evolving Strategies for Containment", *CRPF Samachar*, 2006.

[46] Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, *Naxal Terror*, 2007, http://www.flonnet.com/fl2418/stories/20070921500400400.htm, accessed 28/03/2010.

[47] Prem Mahadevan, "The Maoist Insurgency in India: Between Crime and Revolution", *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 23.2 (2012), 203, 211.

[48] Mahadevan, "The Maoist Insurgency", 210-15; Rajat Kumar Kujur, "From CRZ to SEZ: Naxal Reins of Terror", Article No. 2271 (New Delhi: Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies), 2007.

[49] Mahadevan, "The Maoist Insurgency", 208-10.

[50] Ibid., 219-20; Sukanya Podder, "The Politics of Gun Control and India's Internal Security", *Strategic Analysis,* 1.4 (2007), 675–87.

[51] Interview with Sub Inspector of Imamganj on 4/8/2012 and with a Naxal sympathiser in Imamganj on 31/7/2012.

[52] Interview with Deputy Commandant of CoBRA Battalion at Barhi, Hazaribagh on 6/8/2012.

2. Democracy and Development

The British colonial state saw the backwardness of Indian economy and its widespread poverty as an affect of 'Indian-ness'. Against the turbulent introduction of governmental legislation in Jharkhand, discussed in the previous section, the logic behind the emergent governmental apparatus saw "circulation of money in the hills ... [as] the most likely bait to ensure attachment of the [tribal] chiefs". By introducing the *zamindari* system whereby *zamindars* (landlords) acquired legal rights to evict peasants from land, an attempt was made to replace the customary land regime with legal land regimes.[53] The forested areas were brought under direct rule through land use regimes for mining and forest management.[54] The main feature of the emerging exclusionary policy was a paternalistic rule that was to facilitate maximum revenue with minimum administration mainly by extracting the mineral and forest resources of the region, but in the name of protecting the tribal from 'wily outsiders'.[55]

The nationalist discourse, contrarily, saw the colonial drain of wealth, agrarian involution, ruined handicraft industries, and suppressed manufacturing industry as the source of its backwardness.[56] Therefore the Indian state, aimed "to feed the starving people, and to clothe the naked masses, and to give every Indian the fullest opportunity to develop himself according to his capacity".[57] Furthermore, it was to be undertaken by the modern bureaucratic elite and intelligentsia to avoid severity of pre-industrial transformation through a 'passive revolution'.[58] Thus, the state and its planning mechanism was to "become the positive instruments of resolving conflict"[59] rooted in developmental deficit, by securing economic growth[60] instead of mass mobilisation and political negotiation.[61] Ironically, for the Jharkhand region, the post-colonial Indian state continued with the colonial, rationalist, integrationist, and bureaucratic model of tribal administration. The future of tribal administration, decided upon by the Constituent Assembly, argued that "(a) the tribals need to be 'civilised'; (b) development as defined by the mainstream [national industrial led development] is extremely desirable [for the tribals]; (c) the tribal groups need to integrated and assimilated into the mainstream; and (d) tribal customs need protection from the majority community".[62]

In the post-colonial Nehruvian discursive regime, the Planning Commission was to create conditions to ensure high living standards with full and equal opportunity for all its citizens by satisfying their basic needs for active social participation.[63] However, excessive bureaucratisation led to a technocratic understanding of poverty,[64] with poverty lines and poverty headcounts based on contested definitions of minimum needs, means to collect information and units of analysis. Poverty, thus, instead of being rooted in exploitative socio-economic and political structure, was seen to be caused by low levels of productivity and a lack of continuous work. Therefore, remedies involved enabling "the lowest income groups to earn enough through productive employment to meet their minimum

[53] Devalle, *Discourses of Ethnicity,* 59, 66-67.

[54] Alpa Shah, "The Intimacy of Insurgency: Beyond Coercion, Greed or Grievance in Maoist India", *Economy and Society,* 42.3 (2013), 429-31.

[55] Prakash, *Jharkhand*, 44, 48.

[56] Corbridge et al., *Seeing the State*, 59.

[57] Speech by Jawaharlal Nehru while moving the 'Resolution on Aims and Objects', Constituent Assembly Debates, 22 January 1947.

[58] Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments,* 208-09.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Francine R. Frankel, *India's Political Economy: 1947–1977* (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 1978), 18.

[61] Thomas B. Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Chichester: Princeton U. P., 1999).

[62] Prakash, *Jharkhand*, 80-81.

[63] Government of India, *The First Five Year Plan*, (New Delhi: Planning Commission 1951), 613.

[64] Sudipta Kaviraj, "On State, Society and Discourse in India", *IDS Bulletin*, 21.4 (1990), 9.

needs".[65] This production of statistics on increasing absolute poverty amid acute agrarian crisis, an eroding Congress system and suspended planning symbolised serious issues confronting a weakened polity. This bureaucratic understanding and redressal of poverty and underdevelopment in India translated very poorly for the tribal regions of the state of Bihar. Over the course of this regime of development, Jharkhand saw increasing relative decline in the developmental profile of the region relative to that of Bihar.[66] Thus, it produced a paradoxical situation wherein industrial development was accompanied by agrarian impoverishment in the region of Jharkhand as it increasingly became an internal colony of Bihar and India. The commercial development of forest resources increased the restriction on the population dependent of them. On the industrial front, the region received one-fifth of India's total investment in the public sector undertaking in the industrial sector leading to rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. However, with steady increase in immigration, 10% of the immigrants ended up occupying 50% of the industries.[67]

In the closing years of the 1960s, a loosely aligned Jharkhand Legislative Party joined the coalition government in Bihar of 1967. In return, a statutory body for Chotanagpur and Santal Pargana was formed for deciding on matters of tribal education, employment, welfare and development policies. With the return of Congress in the next general election in 1972, developmental concerns of the region emerged on the national political scene.[68] However, institutional politics and its dominant development discourse of industrialisation for nation-building failed to redress local grievances. In both tribal and non-tribal agrarian areas, peasants mobilised on the issue of land-alienation and the poverty of share-croppers and agricultural labourers. By late 1960s, protest against growing encroachment on forest areas and natural resources became wide spread, together with struggles against coal companies of Dhanbad and Hazaribagh. The issue included compensation and rehabilitation of displaced peasants. The period between 1973 and 1975 was also the peak years of worker peasant alliance.[69]

The government response to the growing turbulence across India was the '*garibi hatao'* [remove poverty] campaign, which led to a highly populist and deinstitutionalising 'demand politics'[70] wherein interest groups could influence government agencies. Thus, capital-goods-based industrialisation was abandoned in the name of redistribution of growth[71] and benefits of development[72] through specific programmes for selected target groups of population and areas[73] to reduce disparities in income and living. In all this, 'redistribution with growth' and 'integrated rural development' with targeted beneficiaries became the hallmark of the developmental discourse of the 1970s.[74] For tribal Jharkhand, a distributive strategy of delivery of funds earmarked for tribal welfare policies and the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) was adopted. Administrative blocks, sub-divisions and districts with more than 50% of tribal population were chosen under the policy. The share of TSP in the total outlay of the plan increased from 14% to 17% during the fifth Five Year Plan, to 21% in the sixth Five Year Plan, 24% seventh Five Year Plan, and then

[65] Government of India, *The Third Five Year Plan*, (New Delhi: Planning Commission, 1961), 11.

[66] Prakash, *Jharkhand*, 135, 150-68.

[67] Devalle, *Discourses of Ethnicity*, 78, 82-88.

[68] Prakash, *Jharkhand*, 115.

[69] Devalle, *Discourses of Ethnicity*, 103-04, 142.

[70] Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (Chicago: Chicago U. P., 1987).

[71] Corbridge et al., *Seeing the State,* 65-66.

[72] Government of India, *The Fifth Five Year Plan*, (New Delhi: Planning Commission, 1974), 8.

[73] Government of India, *The Sixth Five Year Plan* (New Delhi: Planning Commission. 1981), 17.

[74] Corbridge et al. *Seeing the State,* 68.

up to 36%. However with only 4% to 10% of the total allotted funds of the TSP was actually utilised, with marginal improvement in the developmental profile of the Jharkhand region. Soon Congress co-opted JMM leaders in the elections of 1980 as the more militant movement in the region was withdrawn.[75]

A new political constituency of 'the poor' was invented by making planning increasingly central to populist democracy and its vote bank politics.[76] Thus, politics of recognition, redistribution and representation within the context of the 'political society'[77] led to a functioning democracy amidst increasing political violence. It became increasingly difficult for the political process to accommodate the demands of the newly mobilised groups[78] that aimed to enhance the capabilities of the 'poor', by pursuing 'inclusive growth'.[79] Furthermore, development was evaluated in terms of the quality of life of people based on three critical dimensions of well-being: longevity, education and command over resources.[80] This led to the idea of active 'poor', participation, accountability, decentralisation and democratisation in poverty reduction schemes.[81] Debates focused on coverage, efficacy and reach of governance initiatives, its contestation through the politics of social justice and its democratic institutionalisation in the local socio-political context. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI)[82] thus generated a lot of expectations as institutions of local democracy as well as anchors of socio-economic transformation, rooted in their ability to structure the access of marginalised sections to local governance institutions, their control over developmental resources and distribution of developmental funds.[83] This new emphasis on the participation of the citizens, through PRI, has been on the agenda of all the political parties since 1999.

With wide discursive consensus about decentralisation and participation, the parliamentary debates focused on contesting implementation issues, challenging the centrality of PRIs as the primary implementing mechanism for all governance initiatives. In the 21st century, the democratic developmental discourse in India continued to see poverty emanating from unemployment and illiteracy as the main governance problem. In this pursuit, two primary legislations debated in parliament were the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA/MNREGA) 2005, directed against poverty and unemployment, and, the Right to Education (RTE).[84]

At the turn of the century, the state of Jharkhand was created on 15 November 2001. As the 28th state of the Union of India comprising of 18 districts of Bihar, the state of Jharkhand was created to enable the people of the region to chart alternate paths of development. However, as developmental funds from national and international agencies began to flow in, many tribal communities came to believe that "Jharkhand has been delivered to the very *dikus* (non-Adivasi or outsiders) that the Jharkhand movement had long committed to remove from power, and perhaps even residence, in the Land of Forests".[85] Due to the lack of stable political coalitions and opportunistic politics, Jharkhand has seen three general elections, six chief ministers and four periods of President's Rule since its

[75] Prakash, *Jharkhand*, 123-4, 204-05.

[76] Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments,* 218-19.

[77] Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflection on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia U. P., 2004).

[78] Several authors have argued for this point including Francine R. Frankel and M. S. A. Rao, eds., *Dominance and State Power in Modern India, Decline of social order*, 2 vols. (Delhi: Oxford U. P., 1989-90); Atul Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability* (New York: Cambridge U. P., 1990); Francine R. Frankel et al., eds., *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2002); Ghanshyam Shah, *Social Movements in India: A Review of the Literature* (New Delhi: Sage, 2004).

[79] Government of India, *Approach to the 11th Five Year Plan (2007-2012)* (New Delhi: Planning Commission, 2006), 1.

[80] Government of India, *National Human Development Report 2001* (New Delhi: NHRC, 2002), 23.

[81] Ibid., 75-79.

[82] Emerged only after the 72nd and 73rd Amendments to the Constitution of India in 1992.

[83] For details see Niraja Gopal Jayal et al., eds., *Local Governance in India: Decentralisation and Beyond* (New Delhi: Oxford U. P., 2006); David N. Gellner and Krishna Hachhethu, eds., *Local Democracy in South Asia: Microprocesses of Democratisation in Nepal and Its Neighbours* (New Delhi: Sage, 2008); Girish Kumar, *Local Democracy in India: Interpreting Decentralisation* (New Delhi: Sage, 2006).

[84] Under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009.

[85] Stuart Corbridge, et. al., eds., *Jharkhand: Environment, Development, Ethnicity* (New Delhi: Oxford U. P. 2004), 1.

creation. The sheer diversity of ruling elites and their changing alliances has ensured that no chief minister has ever completed a full tenure in 15 years of the state's existence.

The developmental profile of the new state continued with its deplorable historical legacies with more than half its population living below the poverty line. Further its infrastructure was poor, with 60% of the villages lacking road connectivity and 85% lacking electrification. Jharkhand has the highest rate of food insecurity in the country, with a very poor, limited and corrupt public distribution.[86] In terms of health policies, the document hopes to provide free access to primary health care for all, but low budgetary allocation and lack of accountability at local levels of government makes the primary health system largely ineffective. With more than half its population illiterate, the state needs to improve school infrastructure. However, instead of filling teacher vacancies and strengthening the government school system, there is an increasing trend towards privatisation of education. Tribal students are more deprived as the medium of instruction is not in their mother tongue. Inadequate numbers of school with low number of teachers add to the severity of the problems of primary schooling system.[87] There is no reference to land reform in the Vision 2010 document despite widespread prevalence of land alienation amongst *Adivasis*. Moreover, the Jharkhand Panchayati Raj Act, 2001, did not provide for any role of *gram sabha* (village community) consultation for acquiring land. Transfer of land from *Adivasis* to contractors through privately negotiated temporary leases has had serious implications for the livelihood of the local population as well as sustenance of common property resources.[88]

With its dismal human development index at the bottom among all Indian states, 22 out of the 24 districts of Jharkhand are affected in varying degrees, by Naxalism. These districts were clubbed with the Backward Districts Initiative (BDI), later extended as Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF). The original objective of the policy initiative was to remove barriers to growth, accelerate development and improve the quality of life. The index of backwardness comprised three parameters of equal weightage: "(i) value of output per agricultural worker; (ii) agriculture wage rate; and (iii) percentage of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population of the districts." However, two thirds of the districts identified do not satisfy the above criteria of backwardness.[89] Later, the Planning Commission categorised Naxal-affected districts across ten significant factors including high SC/ST population ration, low literacy, low urbanisation, high forest cover, high share of agricultural labour, low per capita food grain production, low level of road length per 100 square km, high share of rural households lacking bank accounts and high share of rural households without specified assets.[90] With the Forest Right Act (2006), forest dwellers have been given non-transferable, inalienable and inheritable land rights in forest areas.[91] However, despite increasing amount of developmental funds being poured into these Naxal-affected areas there remains the governance issue of seriousness in realizing policy. Further mobilisation against Special

[86] M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, *Food Insecurity Atlas of Rural India*, Chennai and World Food Programme, India, 2001; N. Rao, "Jharkhand Vision 2010: Chasing Mirages", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38.18 (2003), 1755; Jos Mooij, "Food and Power in Bihar and Jharkhand: PDS and its Functioning", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36.34 (2001), 3289-90.

[87] Kumar Rana and Samantak Das, "Primary Education in Jharkhand", *Economic and Political Weekly,* 39.11 (2004), 1171-1178.

[88] N. Rao, "Jharkhand Vision 2010", 1757; Nandini Sundar, "Bastar, Maoism and Salwa Judum", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41.29 (2006), 3187-92; Nitya Rao, "Displacement from Land: Case of Santal Parganas", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40.41 (2005), 4439-4442.

[89] V. Venkatesan, "A Flawed Concept", 2007 http://www.flonnet.com/fl2418/stories/20070921501702100.htm, accessed 28/3/2010.

[90] Planning Commission, *Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas: Report of an Expert Committee to the Planning Commission* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2008), 19-20.

[91] Corbridge, et al., *India Today,* 206-09**;** B. Bhatia, "The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40.14 (2005), 1536-1549.

Economic Zone (SEZ) has given a new lease of life to the mass movements of the CPI (Maoist).[92] SEZs have become mechanisms of 'accumulation by dispossession' with particularly adverse effects on Adivasi livelihood.

In practice, welfare schemes anchored on the 3-tier PRIs are seen as mechanisms ensuring redistribution and local participatory governance. This was believed to allow for a more coherent and effective public policy process, with responsibility for implementing developmental schemes.[93] However, nearly all respondents agreed that local state actors continued to wield decisive authority over the choice of developmental work and beneficiaries, in spite of claims about decentralisation and devolution of substantive power to PRIs. A *pramukhpati*[94] pointed out, "*afsarshahi* [rule by official] still continues".[95] Their autonomy is further curtailed by the over-insistence on procedure by officials to the detriment of the project. Thus, rigid and mechanical guidelines combined with a veto function performed by the local state circumscribe the fruitful participation under the PRIs.[96]

Turning to the efficacy of PRIs in structuring development policy outcomes, it was reported that they have been successful in ensuring the accountability of some components of development bureaucracy such as the local *anganwadi* (women and childcare units) workers and primary schools.[97] However, PRIs are not always successful in ensuring such a positive policy outcomes. For instance, an official in Hazaribagh pointed out that "only those who are better off among the reserved categories have been able to avail the benefits of reservation in education and employment".[98] Also, as the PRIs acquire a degree of participation-based legitimacy, the Naxal leadership is keen to partake of it by contesting elections to the PRIs and enhance their claims of legitimacy at the cost of the state.[99]

PRIs have increased the inclusivity of policies with effective and transparent verification of the beneficiaries, but have not had autonomy in term of choice of project and the manner in which they are to be implemented. Also, while they are successful in ensuring accountable governance by PRI-level official, they are ineffective against those higher-up. In terms of facilitating politically differentiating development, while the reservation of beneficiaries has created bottlenecks for the implementation of policies, those for women have varied in terms of the socio-cultural background of the representatives. In tribal areas, women PRIs have been extremely effective and reservation of seats has led to inclusion of many hitherto marginalised sections into the PRIs, which bode well for increasing popular participation and legitimacy.[100] However, in non-tribal areas, patriarchy rules ensure that more affluent, upper-caste women are side-lined by their husbands notwithstanding reservation of seats for them. Furthermore, problems of proxy-representation persist, especially in case of women are visible wherein husband or a male relative of such PRI representatives exercise her powers as *mukhiyapati* and *pramukhpati*.[101]This undermines the efficacy of the participative logic of empowerment that is embedded in the PRIs.

[92] Venkatesan, *A Flawed Concept*; Ramakrishnan, "Naxal Terror", http://www.flonnet.com/fl2418/stories/20070921500400400.htm, accessed 28/03/2010.

[93] Government of India, *Annual Report 2006-07* (New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, 2007), 27.

[94] A colloquial term for the husbands of women PRI representatives who interact with the larger public while the elected representative, the wife, meets officials.

[95] Interview at Kataksandi block, Hazaribag district, Jharkhand, 6/11/2011.

[96] Interview in Gaya on 10/11/2011.

[97] Interview with female Ward member of Banhepanchayat, Simariya on 17/11/2011.

[98] Interview in DRDO, Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, on 3/11/2011.

[99] Interview with PRI representative in Lohardaga district, Jharkhand, on 12/11/2011; and with a state official in Chatra district on 17/11/2011.

[100] Address of PRI representative to the Gram Sabha in Lohardaga district, Jharkhand, on 12/11/2011.

[101] Interview in Chatra district, Jharkhand on 17/11/2011.

3. Recognition and Redistribution

The issue of special provision on grounds of social justice, first introduced in case of the tribal population in India, was based on the theory that two communities could not be expected to vote together for one common good. It was given official recognition by the Morley-Minto reforms, 1909, which granted separate electorate for Muslims. Since then all subsequent concessions for popular government with representative institutions was accompanied by an obligation on part of the government to ensure that minorities were protected from oppression and exploitation. The Government of India Act, 1919, gave the Provincial Governor special responsibility 'to protect the legitimate interests of the minorities'. With the 'Communal Award' of 1932, separate electorates were granted to Muslims, Europeans, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo Indians, Depressed Classes (i.e., Scheduled Castes or Dalits in contemporary parlance), women, labour, commerce and industry, mining and planting and landholders.[102]

[102] Rao, *The Framing of India's Constituion,* 741-42.

Nationalists like Gokhale were quick to critique this as a policy of 'divide and rule'. They put forth an assimilationist all-inclusive ideology of 'unity in diversity' with "adequate safeguards ... for minorities, backward tribal areas, depressed and other backward classes.[103] With this goal, the Constituent Assembly discussed the scope of economic, political, and socio-cultural safeguards as well as the institutional mechanisms needed to administer these and ensure their subsequent continuation. Following these debates, the sub-committee rejected the provision of separate electorate, but conceded the reservation of seats in the legislature and in public service.

[103] Constitutent Assembly Debates, Vol. I, 57.

The attitude of the Constituent Assembly was to further 'exoticise' the Scheduled Tribes who were seen as "requiring long term protection and development. Thus, besides affirmative action policies, tribal areas (or Scheduled Areas) further benefited from being treated as separate administrative categories in order to protect the rights of Adivasis over land forest and water."[104] The Indian Constitution too, accepted the category of tribal as given, without offering clear guidelines for the identification of tribes. The Report of the Scheduled Caste and Tribe Commission, 1952, further reinforced this image by suggesting certain indicators for identifying tribal groups – isolation, racial characteristics, the use of 'tribal dialects', 'animism', 'primitive' economic activities, eating habits (non-vegetarian), dress ('naked or semi naked'), nomadism, propensity to drink and dance. Even the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission, appointed under the chairmanship of U.N. Dhebar set out the eligibility for declaration of Scheduled Areas as: "preponderance of tribals in the population; compact and reasonable size; under-developed nature of the areas; [and] marked disparity in economic standards of the people".[105]

[104] Shah, *In the Shadows of the State*, 18-19.

[105] Devalle, *Discourses of Ethnicity,* 32.

In Jharkhand, demands for a separate state was rejected by the State Reorganisation Commission. Electoral considerations, moreover, pushed regional

parties to open their membership to non-tribals as well. Moreover, segmentation of labour along ethnic lines occurred because of a discriminatory and exploitative mindset regarding the inability of tribals to acquire industrial skills, perpetuating pre-capitalist modes of production in service of the needs of capital. There was, above all, a steady increase in immigration of non-tribals who came to occupy 50% of the industrial jobs, accentuating the already existing Jharkhandi-*diku* tensions in the region.[106] There was also an increasing divide between Christian and non-Christian tribals, with demands to exclude the former from the list of Scheduled Tribes and its reservation benefits.[107] To further complicate the situation, there was an increasing number of marginalised non-tribals in the region since the mid-1970s. Hence, efforts were directed towards forming an alliance between tribal and non-tribal peasantry and workers. In this pursuit, the regional Jharkhandi identity was redefined as anyone who worked in the region, and a *diku* was anyone who exploited others.[108] Thus the mobilisation identity acquired a regional rather than ethnic basis in its demand for separate state.

[106] Ibid., 82-99.

[107] Prakash, *Jharkhand*, 118-19.

[108] Prakash, *Jharkhand*, 120-2; Devalle, *Discourses of Ethnicity*, 145-46, 165-73.

In course of the 1980s, with the rise of caste-based leaders and lower caste and Scheduled Caste-based socialist parties focusing on reservation, the decision to implement the recommendations of the Second Backward Classes Commission (the Mandal Commission) extended the scope of reservations for the Socially and Economically Backward Classes at an all-India level of 49.5 per cent in the public sector.[109] However, the rise of Hindu nationalism under BJP, the communal politics of the Congress and anti-reservation sentiments of post-Mandal politics − all became a central feature of the political process at the turn of the century. The 1990s also saw a more general assault on the rise to power of the Other Backward Castes (OBC), with various caste groups demanding OBC status and contesting the scope of reservation, and with the growing support for reservations for women.[110] The rise of Hindu nationalist BJP in the 1990s in the tribal land of Jharkhand with their alternative project of Vananchal was supported by big businessmen, small traders and pretty bourgeoisie from the *sahu*, *teli*, and *bania* communities. It only included eighteen district of Bihar, instead of the 'Greater Jharkhand' demand that had been put forward by the Jharkhand movement which included districts from three other states as well. The more important strategy was to exploit the division within the tribal communities between the *saran dharmis* (indigenous tribal religious communities) and tribals who had converted to Christianity. The difference between the two communities was established and accentuated by the vast difference in their socio-economic status.

[109] Christophe Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), 73.

[110] Corbridge et al., *Seeing the State,* 70-74.

Conclusion

The contemporary discursive consensus in India is dominated by concerns of coverage, efficiency and reach of governmental intervention, their political differentiation on grounds of redistribution, recognition and representation, and

the democratic institutional anchor to embed these practices. The multi-pronged consensus that anchors the contemporary governance processes is a product of both colonial and the post-colonial discourse. While some of the core premises of the colonial discourse were incorporated, the keenly-contested political context of the country has led the discursive premises to be rearticulated and renegotiated. The contemporary discursive consensus is thus a result of both, the constitutive premises as also the political experience of the country. Consequently, certain elements seem to have run unbroken for the past six decades (such as the consensus over security, particularly, internal security), while other elements have been introduced and renegotiated though the politics of the country. As has been delineated earlier, the discursive consensus on democracy and development has demonstrated a remarkable ability to incorporate continuity with change. So, while the dependence of the discourse on state-led development process to secure social change continues, a democratisation of the process in terms of many new actors and issues alongside institutional innovation (such as the PRIs) can be noticed.

Moreover, a remarkable degree of consensus exists on each of the threads of the discourse. The contests and disagreements do not interrogate the premises of the discourse, but focus on the governmental mechanisms and modalities. Its strength lies in the fact that it has been able to incorporate challenges as an integral thread of the discourse itself. The implications of such a process is that there is a degree of discursive coherence and stability in the governance processes, but this very stability also reduces the pace of social change in the context of a restless and highly mobilised polity. The extent to which the discursive consensus is able to accommodate the twin challenges of reconciling stability and socio-economic transformation will be a function of state capacity to address social conflict without violence.

Stefano Beggiora

The End of Time *in* Adivasi Traditions or the Time of the End *for* Adivasi Traditions?

Abstract: The recent remarkable economic growth on the Indian subcontinent has moulded a new, powerful, globally active, and even assertive India. At the same time India's indigenous peoples (Adivasis), have benefited the least from the country's rise, whereas their territories and basic human rights have not been openly questioned. Starting from the tragic events of Jharkhand in 2006 and the subsequent judgment of the Supreme Court in 2011, this article proposes a twofold analysis on the concept of the End of Times: as a real risk of the apocalypse of indigenous cultures, and as an ethnographical approach to eschatological rituals and vernacular beliefs.

Keywords: *Adivasi, eschatology, indigeneity, Salwa Judum*, *tribal*

This article intends to propose an analysis of the concept of the End of Time/end of a time-cycle in the indigenous cultures of India. At the dawning of the third millennium – as has repeatedly occurred through human history in all times of crisis – we often hear about the end of the world, catastrophes, the decline of humanity. In such a distressing period of cultural dispersion and ethnic and social upheaval, many new-age movements, as well as many new religions, have engaged with this topic, giving rise to disparate millennial fears.

In the West, the idea of the end of the world is felt more dramatically since the running of time is perceived as occurring along a straight line: we have a development proceeding in a specific direction, and finally what the Greeks called *eschaton*, or the end (*τα έσχατα* – the last things). In the East, the concept of time is perceived as being cyclical, recursive, or rather spiral shaped, with the end of one era being the prelude to a following one. However the sequence of dissolutions (*pralaya* in the Indian sacred tradition) acts as a prelude to the end of an entire major cycle (*mahapralaya*).

Moreover, since time immemorial, all great civilisations – those that have disappeared as well as those still alive – have handed down (through written or oral tradition) prophecies concerning the conclusion of the age: the 'dark era', the 'iron age'/Kali Yuga, i.e. the current age of humanity. The concept of time itself has involved – and still does involve – the need for a conclusion to the human cycle, since it had a beginning chronicled in mythical and cosmogonic memories. However, this conclusion is conceived as the end of time, as the end of a world, as a deluge of fire and rain or as a final war involving the reappearance of the heroes of the past, perhaps in different form. It is described as a dramatic event, an authentic collective punishment or purge, from which the righteous alone will eventually be saved and redeemed and be carried to a new, purified world. The

history of religions has documented a long sequence of disturbing signs anticipating the idea of a final catastrophe; this would be correctly interpreted only by chosen souls. By contrast, in the conception of reversal of sacred and profane, an eschatological feature common to many cultures, all these distortions and anomalies will be evaluated in the opposite way (and therefore positively) by those unable to overcome the barriers of space and time. They would therefore become accomplices of the personified ignorance and violence that will eventually unleash 'The End.'

The idea of a cyclical time, a historical becoming, as well as the idea of *post-mortem*, the cult of the ancestors and the ancestral tie to a territory are possible linkages between tribal[1] India and the major classical traditions of the Subcontinent (Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.). In this play of overlapping layers and cultural osmosis, the knowledge of the Adivasis is as important as any other tradition, and it is possible that it holds valuable lessons for understanding other cultures, since it preserves in a particularly vivid and energetic manner such religious and proto-religious[2] phenomena as ancestry, shamanism, empathy with the sacred, etc. On the other hand, indigenous culture is a paradigmatic starting point for reflection on the world in which we live and on the most important challenge for our future: sustainability, the relationship between human beings and the environment, indigenous knowledge of the forest, etc.

The most important point to note is that tribal cultures are now endangered since the laws of the welfare state (from the Mandal Commission till date) have led to differentiated and inhomogeneous consequences. The creation of a policy specifically addressed to Adivasis was tortuous, development plans were often uneven, and yet today there is an intense debate on the issue of minority rights.[3] While the Adivasi areas are characterised by a series of valuable specificities, such as a rich cultural heritage and an abundance of resources, there are other unresolved critical issues – such as their isolation,[4] a lack of infrastructural development, the presence of centrifugal forces – the resolution of which will be the key to the future of India and a correct balance in its relations with the surrounding countries.

For some years the governments of the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal have signed numerous MoUs (Memorandum of Understanding) with international companies worth several billion dollars, for iron and steel plants, factories, power plants, aluminum refineries and even dams or mines. For such bilateral agreements between the Indian state and multinational corporations to be translated into real development for the country, it seems that the authorities can contemplate no other option than the displacement of the Adivasis who live in those areas. All this contrasts with fifty years of efforts to enact laws on Reserve Forests, on the environmental impact, on the safeguard of minorities' tribal cultural identity and, last but not least, the protection of the Adivasis within their environment.[5] Consequently, in the procedures for

[1] The term tribe, although outdated and questionable, is commonly used in the Indian subcontinent since the indigenous minorities are classified according to the welfare rules and defined by the Indian Constitution in this way (ST: Scheduled Tribes).

[2] We do not intend to give an evolutionist interpretation to Adivasi religiosity, which features varied and constantly evolving cultural aspects. The belief that shamanism was the universal religion of Paleolithic hunter-gatherers and that it represents a kind of neurotheology has the problematic nature of many of the central assumptions concerning shamanism and its place in the development of human religiosity. On the other hand, it is anyway clear that in South-Asian shamanism several archaic elements common to most religions are vividly present. While it is commonly accepted that many indigenous groups have undergone a process of Hinduisation in the Indian subcontinent through the ages, it is my opinion, however, that the opposite is not excluded, that tribal cultures have brought – and possibly continue to bring – a significant contribution to Indian religions. See Homayun Sidky, "On the Antiquity of Shamanism and Its Role on Human Religiosity", *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion,* 22 (2010), 68-92.

[3] Padmanabh Samarendra, "Anthropological Knowledge and Statistical Frame: Caste in the Census in Colonial India", in Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar, eds., *Caste in Modern India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2014,) Vol. 1, 256-93.

[4] The concept of isolation has often been stereotyped and romanticised particularly in the colonial and in the first post-colonial period. It is not possible to theorise an absolute isolation today for communities that through the centuries have always interacted in some way with their regional social background. However peculiar elements of the territory, such as the inaccessibility of the jungles or Himalayan valleys – from which adaptation processes, techniques of subsistence and general conditions of backwardness derive – are today taken into account by the Indian government. This element thus appears as relative or rather this isolation of the Adivasis can be considered as a result of their marginalisation under colonial rule. Bhangya Bhukia, "Enclosing Land, Enclosing Adivasis: Colonial Agriculture and Adivasis in Central India, 1853-1948", *Indian Historical Review*, 40.1 (2013), 93-116.

[5] Stefano Beggiora, "Storia delle politiche tribali e del *Tribal Welfare* in India dal periodo coloniale a oggi", in Gian Giuseppe Filippi, ed., *Il concetto di uomo nelle società del Vicino Oriente e dell'Asia Meridionale* (Venezia: Libreria Editrice Universitaria Cafoscarina [Eurasiatica 84], 2010), 17-40.

registration and authorisation of Special Economic Zones (SEZ), some governments have acquired land using the power of expropriation for public utility.[6]

Vedanta Resources Plc *docet*. The desperate battle of the Kondhs against Vedanta multinational steelworks, which was destroying the sacred mountain of Niyamgiri in Odisha is now quite renowned. That incident fortunately reached the headlines, gaining greater visibility leading to broad participation from below, as well as raising awareness among international organisations and members of the public who embrace the cause of environmentalism and human rights of minorities.[7] Indeed, that was a paradigmatic case of a thousand battles that are fought silently even today in these states and throughout India.

Today the tribal areas are increasingly becoming areas of contrast and conflict. In the Northeast, for example,[8] the ethnic and cultural identity of many indigenous minority groups has often been used to foster centrifugal and separatist pushes.[9] But in the so-called Red Corridor, many districts are considered 'Naxal affected': the Indian government continues to define the Naxalite movement as Maoist. The left-wing extremist movement in India goes back to the famous peasant revolt of 1967 that took place in Naxalbari in West Bengal, led by Communist cadres subsequently expelled from the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in 1969, in particular by Charu Mazumdar and Kanyu Sanyal. Later, the AICCCR (All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries) formed the Communist Party of India-Marxist Leninist (CPI-ML), led by Charu Mazumdar in order to fight against the landowner and caste system through an armed struggle without any mediation with the 'bourgeois state'. Since then, the goals and strategies of the movement have greatly changed. After the death of Mazumdar there was a period of fragmentation between 1972 and 1980 leading up to the emergence of the People's War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) in 1999-2000.[10] Currently, despite a phase called 'strategic united front against state repression' marked by the fusion of the PWG and MCC in the CPI-Maoist in September 2004, the Naxalite movement is not monolithic in character, but boasts many regional groups who are very active.[11] It is clear, on the other hand, that Maoism as it was understood in the Sixties, culminated at that time. Today, however, all the dissatisfaction of those who have suffered for years from a lack of institutions has clustered around the Naxalite movement. It would be more correct to define those groups that also involve minorities as "More than Maoist".[12]

The response was the *Salwa Judum*: euphemistically known as 'the Peace March' in Chhattisgarh, the project involved the creation of paramilitary militias, which in turn organised an army of volunteers recruited from among the tribal populations, soon to be armed in order to flush out the Naxalites hiding in the jungle through a military operation called 'Green Hunt'.[13] A few years ago this atrocity appeared paradigmatic since it highlighted a policy that, in the attempt to solve the problems, contributes rather to crushing the social fabric of the lower castes and indigenous

[6] This practice has in the past also had several precedent: U. N. Majhi, "Tribal Land Alienation: Needs Radical Solution", in Akhila B. Ota, ed., *Critical Issues in Tribal Development* (Bhubaneswar: Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute, 2009), 180-86; Karunakar Patnaik, "Land Alienation and other Land Related Issue in Tribal Area. An Overview", in Ivi, 187-204.

[7] Amnesty International, *Don't Mine Us Out of Existence: Bauxite Mine and Refinery Devastate Lives in India* (London: ASA, February 2010); Survival International, "Vedanta Resources/Complaint to the UK National Contact Point under the Specific Instance Procedure of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises", December 2008. See also the documentary film *Mine: Story of a Sacred Mountain*, by T. Nicholas, 2008.

[8] Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* [2007] (New Delhi: Pan Macmillan-Picador India, 2012), 261-278.

[9] Many armed factions in the various scenarios of the northeastern border in recent decades have hinged on ethnicity and identity notions (i.e. Nagas, Bodos, ULFA of Assam, ATTF of Tripura, PLA and Kangleipak Party of Manipur etc.). As the issue is too complex to be treated here, we will therefore make only a quick reference: see the whole section 2 of the book of Arpita Anant, ed., *Non State Armed Group in South Asia: A Preliminary Structured Focused Comparison* (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses/Pentagon Security International, 2012), 65-150. See also: S. K. Agnihotri and B. Datta-Ray, *Perspective of Security and Development in North East India* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2002); Ved Prakash, *Terrorism in India's North-east: A Gathering Storm* (Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2008); Sankaran Kalyanaraman, "Thinking about Counter Terrorism in India's National Strategy", in Krishnappa Venkatshamy and Princy George, eds., *Grand Strategy for India 2020 and Beyond* (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses/Pentagon Security International, 2012), 107-128; Namrata Goswami,, *Indian National Security and Counter-Insurgency: The Use of Force Vs Non-violent Response* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

[10] Javeed Alam, "Communist Politics in Search of Hegemony", in Zoya Hasan, ed., *Parties and Party Politics in India* [1988] (New Delhi: Oxford U. P., 2013), 289-316; Rabindra Ray, *The Naxalites and Their Ideology* (New Delhi: Oxford U. P., 2011).

[11] Palepu V. Ramana, *Measure to Deal with Left Wing Extremism/Naxalism* (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses/Pentagon Security International, 2011), 8-11; Palepu V. Ramana, "Profiling Indian Maoists: An Overview", in Anant, ed., *Non State Armed Group in South Asia*, 151-164.

[12] Guha, *India After Gandhi,* 619-621. See also Robert Jeffrey et al., eds., *More than Maoism: Politics, Policies and Insurgencies in South Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2013).

[13] Randeep Ramesh, "Inside India's Hidden War", *The Guardian* (May 9, 2006); Rakesh Prakash, "Tribal

people of the place. We would contend that this could be considered a true apocalypse, not in a Christian understanding of the term or in the revelatory sense of its Greek roots, but rather in the common meaning of a predicted ultimate catastrophe.

We now come to document a conflict that has slowly acquired the characteristics of a civil war. In awareness of this, in a geopolitical context that sees China's influence along the Indian border growing out of control, following the political upheavals beyond the border of Nepal, the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh expressed serious concerns about the insurgency in the so-called Red Corridor. The fact dates back to the 2006 elections, but its echoes continue to reverberate in all the newspapers: even more than Islamic terrorism, the Naxalite threat was depicted as being "the single biggest challenge" for India.[14] However, few people seem to wonder about the actual impact of statements like this. Local government forces and police, facing the well-established network of Maoists in inland tribal areas, awaited a positive sign from the Central government. This admission by the Prime Minister legitimised the hopes of local police forces who, together with the Government of Chhattisgarh, demanded a massive intervention on the part of the army. Unexpectedly, at that time, however, the upper echelons of the Indian Army considered the Naxalite insurgency to be a local problem of public order and declined to give direct support, arguing as justification the intensification of activities in Kashmir and the Northeast.[15]

In 2006 therefore arose the abomination of the *Salwa Judum*, almost as a natural response to the contradictory hesitation of the Central government on the issue. While the inclination to pacifism of the unpretentious people of the tribes is indeed desirable, it goes without saying that the distribution of weapons to the population in general is probably not a good idea and could easily lead to an indiscriminate use of force. Thereafter, violence and attacks were reported throughout the region, merciless battles in which any non-belligerence among ordinary citizens was interpreted by each faction as siding with the enemy. Incidents of rape have been recorded, as well as the systematic burning of villages inevitably involving the killing of innocent people. All these cases, destined to descend into a turmoil of violence and madness, led the paramilitary militias to support the police in Operation Green Hunt. This was a clear paradigm of the Times of the End, precisely because it represents a tangible risk of the annihilation of that world and of indigenous cultures.

Here, despite the army initially distancing itself, special forces have converged from different Indian territories under the aegis of a policy called WHAM (Winning the Hearts and Minds). Among the Special Police Officers (SPO) the *Salwa Judum*-organised tribal squads were known by the name of Koya Commandos, because some groups were formed at the time by young men from the area inhabited by Koyas, although this ethnic affiliation was not a real discriminating factor. In this case we consider that, paradoxically, the most striking

Youths Will Now Fight Naxals", *Times of India* (May 11, 2006); Vishwa Mohan, "Salwa Judum, Force Too Violating Rights", *The Times of India* (Jul. 16, 2008); "Indian State 'Backing Vigilantes'", *BBC News* (July 15, 2008); Aman Sethi, "Green Hunt: The Anatomy of an Operation", *The Hindu* (Feb. 6, 2010).

[14] "Naxalism Biggest Challenge: PM", *Hindustan Times* (*Archives*), New Delhi (April 13, 2006); "Naxalism Biggest Threat to Internal Security: Manmohan", *The Hindu* (May 24, 2010). Fatalities as a result of the fighting or attacks, among the police, the guerrillas Naxalites – the macro-groups of Left Wing Extremism (LWE) and CPI-Maoist – and, finally, among the civilians, according to official sources would exceed six thousand units for the time frame 2005-2014. Since 2007, more than fourteen thousand people have been arrested or surrendered to the government forces: New Delhi Institute for Conflict Management, "Fatalities in Left Wing Extremism, 2005-2014", database updated to 6th April 2014. The data, however, differ in the extensive literature on the subject, it is plausible to argue that in some cases the numbers are based on estimates and projections.

[15] Vivek Chadha, "Left Wing Extremism – Challenges and Approach", in Venkatshamy and George, eds., *Grand Strategy for India 2020,* 93-106.

aspect is that tribal people were sent to fight against other tribal people. It has also been documented that as the battle-front lines between the Naxals and the state shift with every jungle encounter, Adivasis across the zone of operations were forced to assume a series of fluid identities according to the force in power on a given day.

The wave of violence that has ignited many tribal territories partially controlled by the Naxalites, evidently aroused great concern, so much so that after the end of the fighting an inquiry commission was set up to investigate the case. In particular, it was shown that it was not possible to solve the problem of the insurgency through the indiscriminate distribution of weapons to the population. Public opinion finally suffered a real shock at the publication of several photographs showing children enrolled in the SPOs carrying weapons in hand.[16] The image of children carrying weapons – overwhelmed, manipulated, unaware victims of the madness of war – can arouse nothing but sheer horror. All this is much closer to the sad scenarios we are accustomed to seeing in the conflicts of Central Africa. It is truly amazing to read that the Supreme Court of India itself, when called to rule on this juncture, perhaps unsurprisingly referred to the famous novel by Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*. We quote some passages from the document, *The Supreme Court of India*, *Civil Original Jurisdiction* (*Civil*) NO. 250 of 2007, New Delhi, 5 July, 2011:[17]

> The State of Chattisgarh, claims that it has a constitutional sanction to perpetrate, indefinitely, a regime of gross violation of human rights in a manner, and by adopting the same modes, as done by Maoist/Naxalite extremists. The State of Chattisgarh also claims that it has the powers to arm, with guns, thousands of mostly illiterate or barely literate young men of the tribal tracts, who are appointed as temporary police officers, with little or no training, and even lesser clarity about the chain of command to control the activities of such a force, to fight the battles against alleged Maoist extremists.
>
> As we heard the instant matters before us, we could not but help be reminded of the novella, *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad ... Set against the backdrop of resource rich darkness of the African tropical forests, the brutal ivory trade sought to be expanded by the imperialist-capitalist expansionary policy of European powers, Joseph Conrad describes the grisly, and the macabre states of mind and justifications advanced by men, who secure and wield force without reason, sans humanity, and any sense of balance. The main perpetrator in the novella, Kurtz, breathes his last with the words: "The horror! The horror!". Conrad characterised the actual circumstances ... as "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience".
>
> As we heard more and more about the situation in Chattisgarh, and the justifications being sought to be pressed upon us by the respondents, it began to become clear to us that the respondents were envisioning modes of state action that would seriously undermine constitutional values. ... Through the course of these proceedings, as a hazy picture of events and circumstances in some districts of Chattisgarh emerged, we could not but arrive at the conclusion that

[16] Suhas Chakma, ed., *India's Child Soldiers* (New Delhi: Asian Center for Human Rights, 2013), 2, 6-7.

[17] Also reported under the name of Nandini Sundar Case, it takes its name precisely from Nandini Sundar, a writer and professor of sociology at Delhi University who started the petition, which was then signed by many prominent personalities in India, and which will be destined to be an uncommon case in Indian law since the Court will recognize the actions of the state of Chhattisgarh as unconstitutional. The judgment is now available at major Indian newspaper archives and legal sites with the title: *Nandini Sundar and Ors. vs State of Chhattisgarh on 5 July, 2011*. See the Supreme Court of India: http://supremecourtofindia.nic.in/outtoday/wc25007.pdf.

the respondents were seeking to put us on a course of constitutional actions whereby we would also have to exclaim, at the end of it all: "the horror, the horror".[18]

Before we bring this essay to a conclusion, however, it seems appropriate to make at least a general reference to the end of time in traditional terms, or at least to how it can be understood in what we have conventionally defined as tribal shamanism. The term shamanism is currently somewhat controversial and its conventional use has been debated over decades of study.[19] Some scholars have recently proposed the term animism as a qualification of the ontological perspective on the phenomenon.[20] It would require too deep a digression to enter now into this longstanding debate; as far as this study is concerned, we will refer to the attempt to define Central Asian shamanism[21] whose general characteristics are also found in the religion of the Adivasi communities of India and in the rituals of so-called indigenous *pujaris* (priests/worshippers).[22]

Time in the world of Adivasis

In this section we will explore some common concepts that can be found, notwithstanding some obvious regional differences, in most Adivasi communities and in major Indian traditions. Alongside the use of terms from tribal languages the use of sanskritic terms that refer to more or less shared concepts of the Hindu world will however be prevalent. Moreover there is no doubt that the influence of the different castes at the local level has had a significant role in the history of the various indigenous communities. We can however testify in addition that among those Adivasi groups that affirm their identity by rejecting Hindu hegemony over Indian culture, a certain terminology – even if related to sometimes slightly variable contents – is now commonly assimilated. Our highlighting of these similarities does not necessarily aim to evidence a Hinduisation process that, if it certainly has occurred in some circumstances – and should be discussed case by case – we consider to remain a very controversial and open issue. We restrict ourselves here therefore to providing a comparative and phenomenological comparison, in an arduous attempt not to generalise. It is still important to consider that in the contemporary age these cultures are highly endangered, so that the risk of extinction in some ways overlaps tragically with the very religious thought about the end times Through over fifteen years of experience of field-research we have collected many tribal myths, legends and stories: a rich narrative crop concerning the many beginnings and many ends constantly adding to and creating a never-ending succession to the orality of groups,[23] presenting a more or less well-known form, but in some ways not devoid of its own originality and vigour.

The breadth of this fascinating topic is such that in this context we can offer

[18] The Supreme Court of India, Civil Original Jurisdiction (Civil) N. 250 of 2007, New Delhi, *Nandini Sundar and Ors. vs State of Chhattisgarh on 5 July,* 2011, cit., 4-5. See also: J. Venkatesan, "Salwa Judum is Illegal, Says Supreme Court", *The Hindu* (3 August, 2011).

[19] Lars K. Pharo, "A Methodology for a Deconstruction and Reconstruction of the Concepts 'Shaman' and 'Shamanism'", *Numen*, 58 (2011), 6-70; Håkan Rydving, "Le chamanisme aujourd'hui: constructions et déconstructions d'une illusion scientifique", *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines*, 42 (2011), 2-12.

[20] Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (London Wakefield Press: Hurst & Co., 2005); Graham Harvey, "Animism Rather Than Shamanism: New Approaches to What Shamans Do (for Other Animists)", in Bettina Schmidt and Lucy Huskinson, eds., *Spirit Possession and Trance: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Continuum, 2010), 14–34; Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque des Sciences Humaines, 2005).

[21] For a general discussion on the Asiatic shamanism I refer to Åke Hultkrantz, "Ecological and Phenomenological Aspects of Shamanism", in Vilmos Diószegi and Mihály Hoppál, eds., *Shamanism in Siberia*, Vol. 2 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1996), 1–31. For a more critical discussion on this topic I suggest Vladimir N. Basilov, "Cosmos as Everyday Reality in Shamanism: an Attempt to Formulate a More Precise Definition of Shamanism", in Antonio Rigopoulos and Romano Mastromattei, eds., *Shamanic Cosmos. From India to the North Pole Star* (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 1999), 17-40 and Mihály Hoppál, "Shamanism: An Archaic and/or Recent System of Beliefs", in Anna-Leena Siikala and Mihály Hoppál, *eds., Studies on Shamanism* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1992), 117-131.

[22] With a particular reference to the *ādivāsīs* of India see Piers Vitebsky, *The Shaman* (London: Macmillan, 1995); Piers Vitebsky, *Dialogues with the Dead* (New Delhi: Cambridge U. P., 1993).

[23] The culture of the indigenous communities of India is essentially oral: the cosmogonic myths, as well as the traditional knowledge of the forest have been handed down from generation to generation orally. We have observed the crystallisation of these traditions in conventional writing only in rare cases in contemporary times as a result of moments of forceful socio-political change: i.e. religious reforms, the need to be recognised by the Indian state as distinct cultural/ethnic group, the translations by missionaries who strive to bring these cultures to Christianity, etc.

only some preliminary considerations about the most common aspects, accompanied by a few examples. In general, the end of the world is not fully theorised in the tribal world and shamanism. But we can propose the formulation of three premises:

1) Primitive societies based their subsistence on hunting and gathering, for this reason their way of life relied on a close observation of natural cycles: so the idea of the End in itself gives rise to the idea of the renewal of the world. In shamanism in general, this regeneration occurs through the ritual repetition of the cosmogony.
2) The shaman has a profound knowledge of the forces governing nature – both manipulating it and acting as the guardian of its primeval harmony. Thus, shamanism is the spearhead of the (empirical) knowledge of this world with all its subtle forces, but rarely ventures beyond the world (transcendental), providing notions of an eschatological nature.
3) Contemporary movements, with strong new age influences are characterised by messianism and the expectation of the end times regarded as an *eschaton*. This is often the result of a misunderstanding engendered by a misinterpretation of indigenous cultures.

It might be of some interest to digress on this third point. Non-violent nativistic, eschatological, apocalyptic, and millennial themes appear in modern shamanic spirituality, as they do in Neopaganism.[24] Humans and the earth are envisaged as being in grave danger. This is partly due to contemporary man's increasing loss of transcendent awareness and the related weakening of a connection with nature and the spiritual world. On the other hand, "shamanic cultures" have retained this connection and are the custodians of the mystical knowledge that will prevent catastrophe and create a saner world. Part of the mission of modern shamanic spirituality is to prevent the world's destruction by rekindling a lost spiritual awareness. This mission entails learning from indigenous people and carrying out activities in the supernatural world that will save our material world. The current global warming fears and other environmental problems have added fuel to this concern. It is interesting that these Neopagan movements often come into contact with the tribal traditions that they tend to idealise. Otherwise, however, they superimpose their new-age interpretations on actual traditional environments. This matter is of anthropological interest.[25]

The shamanic cosmos of Indian tribes – in continuity with the Hindu and Buddhist traditions – consists of two dimensions, spatial and temporal. The spatial dimension is subdivided according to a sacred geography, which is axial and vertical, and another earthly dimension, which is horizontal and circular. In summary, space can be divided into:

[24] Joan B. Townsend, "Anthropological Perspectives on New Religious Movements", in Joseph Bettis and S. K. Johannesen, eds., *The Return of the Millennium* (Barrytown - NY: New ERA Books, 1984), 137-151.

[25] Bill B. Brunton, "Western Shamanism in a Cultural Context", in AA. VV., *Proceedings of the International Congress: Shamanism and Other Indigenous Spiritual Beliefs and Practices*, Vol. 5, sec. 2 (Moscow: Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 1999), 231-239.

1) Supernal and underworld dimensions: Here the earth's surface separates the empirical world inhabited by men (as well as subtle entities, spirits and deities) from a dark complementary dimension, chthonic (sometimes upside down as if it were a reflection of the former) which is the abode of the dead. This concept is the basis of the cult of the dead and the ancestors.
2) *Vana* e *ksetra*: The forest and field; i.e. the jungle – the dimension of wild nature, the kingdom of spirits and animals, of dynamic and creative potential, of chaos – which is opposed to the field, or rather the domesticated space of the village, inhabited by men, the dimension of order.

Thus time, even in the Indian Adivasi world, is understood through a repetition of cycles, marked by regular intervals of different length, so that it can be imagined as a parabola rather than as a circle, expressing its evolutionary potential interspersed with counter phases of free fall. This motion, which is spiral form according to Indian traditions, seems almost to 'intersec' space in key moments during which all divisions are cancelled and the forces and the relations between the parties seem to reverse. These moments determine the end of the world and its cyclical renewal. Within tribal religions we are able to identify at least three types, three different degrees which characterise the temporal dimension of the shamanic cosmos.

The small cycle is the first short period of time, usually an annual recurrence, characterised by the dissolution of the spatial separation of point 1 (axial). The ritual opening of the passage through the supernal and the underworld dimensions takes place on so-called cataclysmic days; in some villages it occurs one to three times in a year. There are certain preliminary taboos to be respected, at that point time stops, work or cultural activities are suspended: in these days the gates between the human/empirical dimension and the underworld are open and the dead come back to the surface wandering among men. The margin of the chaotic risk of the end of the world is set by the space-time coordinates. However, these festivities combining the cult of the dead with the rituals of spring and fertility (two conceptions which are always strongly related in ancient civilisations) culminate with the renewal of a covenant with the ancestors. This bond is made concrete precisely by the rebirth of the world in the following season.

The *mundus patet*, the ancient rite of worship of Ceres that contains this symbolism, therefore finds a certain correspondence among the Adivasi shamans. The uterus of the world that opens up spewing forth a flood of the dead and other supernatural beings is not in the *cardo* and *decumanus* of the village, but is rather the mortar for grain. This is often to be found, not by chance, at the foot of the central pole that supports the home: almost everywhere in the shamanism of the Subcontinent this supporting pole has an axial symbolism, while the hole of the mortar, dug in front of it, is the way through the dimensions. Among the Lanjia Saoras of Odisha the mortar grinding the grains for the whole community is a

symbol of fecundity. The interaction between the pestle and the womb of the earth clearly alludes to the fertility of a sexual-ancestral act. Other passages consist of megalithic sites in honor of the dead (*ganuar*).[26] From here, on the appointed days, when the activities of the village are postponed and agricultural tools remain silent, the procession of the dead rises to the surface. Among the Lanjia Saoras the commemoration of all the departed is called *karja* and is perhaps the most sumptuous of similar rites in the area, at least for the number of buffalo sacrificed and the profusion of memorial offerings.[27]

The average cycle, marking the end of time and the ritual regeneration of the world, renews itself when the *ksetra* unfolds to the *vana*, usually in cycles of twelve years. Under normal circumstances, the human space of the village, enclosed in the *ksetra* to define it in Hindu terms, is a sacred space surrounded by the primordial chaos of the jungle. This *mandala* is consecrated by the shaman's ritual that defines the boundaries, celebrating sacrifices and offerings, proceeding in a circular motion (*imago aeternitatis*), in the awareness of mimicking the cosmic journey.[28] However, precisely because it is a projection of the macrocosm, the sacred space of men is not immutable and expires over time: it becomes profane as described in India in the sequential theory of *yugas*.[29] Here too at its culmination, at the lowest point of its fall, a reversal takes place, in a process similar to that documented for the shorter cycle time. The shaman accompanied by the bravest warriors of the community must go in the *vana* to restore the purity of the past. This is clearly a *topos* in India: the ascetic (the *vanaprasthin*, the *sadhaka*) performs the ultimate retreat in the jungle, renewing knowledge, through the vision of God, by meditating in the forest (for instance, the asceticism of Rama in the Dandaka forest). Every twelve years, in fact, the *murti* of Jagannatha in Puri is renewed: the sacred wood is transported from the forest to the holy city in a cult whose origins have clear references to the tribal cosmos.[30] For the Oraons of the districts of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, the end of the twelfth year is the celebration for the restoration of the sacred places of *Sarna Devi*, at the edge of the fields of the village, consecrated by the sacrifice of a buffalo.[31] For the Khonds of Odisha, the *meria* festival – an ancient relic of human immolation for Dharani Pennu, the Earth goddess, now celebrated with the sacrifice of a buffalo – is closely related to the spring celebrations and will ensure, through the renewal of the world, fertility of the fields in the years to come. In the area of Kuttias (a Khond subgroup), this festival is observed at yearly intervals, rotating among the villages, until the completion of a full cycle of twelve years that determines the most sumptuous celebration.[32]

The long cycle finally involves the end of this world: the theme frequently recurs of the shaman/hero of the tribe who mediates the end of the mythical time. The theme is developed orally in epic cycles and mythological cosmogony: a primordial hero, the founder of the clan, the first shaman is destined to return. Often the narrative handed down the idea of the history of the community as a removal, a departure, a loss of some faculty or dimension of the ancestors in the

[26] See also Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, "Megalithic Ritual among the Gadabas and Bondos of Odisha", *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Society of Bengal*, 9 (1943), 149-78.

[27] In the cultures of old Europe, there is a vague analogy with the Wild Hunt of the Nordic and Teutonic traditions: the 'Furious Army', is led by a kind of trickster, a Harlequin: the Hölle König with the tailed fox hat is clearly a shamanistic figure. See Claude Lecoteux, *Phantom Armies of the Night* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2011).

[28] Baidyanath Saraswati, "Cosmology, Oral Tradition", in B. Saraswati, ed., *Sacred Science Review*, 2, Varanasi (2003), 4-5.

[29] Marine Carrin, "The Santal Conception of Time", in Georg Pfeffer and Deepak K. Behera, eds., *Contemporary Society: Concept of Tribal Society* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2002), 139-59.

[30] Roland Hardenberg, "The Renewal of Jagannath", in Hermann Kulke and Burkhard Schnepel, eds, *Jagannath Revisited, Studying Society Religion and the State in Odisha* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), 64-92.

[31] Amitabh Pandey, *Conservation and Management of Religious Common Pool Resources: A Study of the Sacred Groves of Jaspur Nagar, Chhattisgarh* (Bhopal: Indian Institute of Forest Management, 2011), 76, 89-90.

[32] Klaus Seeland et al., *Forest Tribes of Odisha. Vol 2: The Kuttia Kondh* (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2006), 245.

mythical time. What was the transition from a higher to a weaker condition will be restored, vice versa, at the end of time, to start the next cycle. Here too, the advent of the hero will be announced by signs, but the final catastrophe, characterised by water and fire, is usually decisive. As in cosmogony, the passage from era to era (or *pralaya*, to use a Hindu term) is marked by fire and water. Fire is the magmatic element: especially in shamanism, which has a strong metallurgical symbolism, there is the principle of transformation of matter. To remain within the imagery of the forge and blacksmith, water – the element that universally holds the potential of the manifest world – cools the molds, tempers steel, fixes the new form and brings about the new world. Here, then for the Saoras, the primeval hero Kittung, the demigod who like Prometheus gave fire to mankind, will come back giving rise to a new world. Not by chance, the Catholic missionaries here have superimposed the image of Christ onto the old cycle of Kittung reinterpreting him in a Christian eschatological key.[33] For the Oraons, the Santals, and for many groups of the Northeast there will be a rain of fire incinerating the world. After the catastrophe there will be a flood, but the diluvial water will initiate the new era.[34] It is interesting to note that where this idea is theorised in a more defined way, the deflagration of the cosmos, the 'battle of the stars',[35] puts an end to space in all its dimensions, transcending the aforementioned axial or geographical subdivisions. It is like a second death and the restoration of a primordial and potential level.

The end of the existing worldly order may be considered as a cultural theme in the context of a mythical configuration to which shamanism makes explicit reference: i.e. the topic of periodic destruction and regeneration of the world in the context of the myth of the renewal of time.

Moreover, on a sociological level, the tribal narrative *corpus* of the end of time and its renewal is a platform of collective identity for local groups and is a guarantee of the purity of its elements. This is the reason why the tale of the End of Times – that it is a master narrative for the group, in which the community emphasises its own Adivasi identity – integrates into a larger context, consisting of recursive cultural elements, which makes up the meta-narrative of Indian culture.

As an anthropological and permanent risk, the *end* is simply the risk of not being able to be in any possible cultural world, the loss of the opportunity to be operationally present in the world, the reduction to annihilation of any horizon of worldly operability, the catastrophe of any community not being able to plan its existence according to its values. Indigenous culture in India is in itself a solemn exorcism of this radical risk. If the cultural theme of the *end* of a certain order is a historical mode of recovery or pre-emption of this risk, even where this issue is less present, the risk is there, however, and the culture of the Adivasis rises to face it.[36]

[33] Stefano Beggiora, *Sonum, spiriti della giungla* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2003), 58-59.

[34] Baidyanath Saraswati, "Forms of Life in the World of Matter: Reflections on Tribal Cosmology", in Jayant V. Narlikar, *The Nature of the Matter*, *Prakrti Series*, 4 (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Center for Arts, 1995), 70-74. Biyokesh Tripathy, *Tribal Myths and Legends of Odisha* (Delhi: Pratibha Prakashan, 2005), 249.

[35] Boniface Tirkey, *The Smiling Uraon, a People on the Move: Introducing India's Uraon Community, Yesterday and Today* (Patna: Navjyoti Niketan, 1989), 72.

[36] 'See Ernesto De Martino, *La fine del mondo: Contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali* [1977] (Torino: Einaudi, 2002), 218-20.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, we would consider that today, war, as an inevitable side effect of compulsory development and modernisation, is quickly wiping out these cultures. The unbridled impulse for greed, born out of modern neo-liberal economic ideology, along with the false promises of an overwhelming growth that will raise the threshold for all consumers, dangerously underlies a scenario that is not yet socially, politically and de facto economically sustainable in vast tracts of India. However, the advocates of the neo-liberal paradigm of development seem to be concerned about the frantic race for positive signs in the variation of the annual percentage of GDP. Development is always understood as the use of resources and increase of productivity.

This process, in India as well as in other countries that are now 'developed', results in a further need for additional resources to bring about successes in production and so on. If such exploitation cannot be managed within tight deadlines, the country is believed to be unable to compete on a global scale, lacking the necessary wealth to efficiently deal with the endemic problems of illiteracy, poverty and backwardness.[37]

The development of large metropolitan centres is producing a major anthropological change in the urban substratum – as it did in other countries during the first and second postwar periods – while large pockets in the country remain cut off from such a change. Meanwhile, the country is growing demographically, and for millions of people there is also a growing awareness of living in a country that desires to be modern, that has the means but perhaps not yet the capacity to ensure for all its citizens a minimum standard of civil rights. If on one hand the rights of Adivasi minorities are violated, on the other the social pressure of unemployment and underemployment is huge.[38]

Our point here is that the idea of progress is the Trojan horse for the pursuit of economic interests, formally deploying itself behind the screen of the technological application of modern scientific knowledge. On the other hand the persecution of economic development was the keystone of the election campaign that has recently led the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s Narendra Modi to win the last elections in 2014.

It is interesting to note that for the right-wing ideology, or more specifically for the concept of *Hindutva*, the Adivasi issue has always been central. According to this vision the indigenous peoples of India are to be considered an integral part of Hindu society. On the evidence of this contamination or reciprocal cultural exchange throughout the Indian history we mentioned above, in many cases, this idea would not be so inaccurate. And on the other hand, this concept was shared by the illustrious names of anthropology descending from Gandhian thought who were more inclined to understand the categorisation 'Hinduism' in its extraordinary

[37] Arundhati Roy, *In marcia con i ribelli* (Parma: Guanda, 2012), 149 [1st ed., *Outlook* (National/Essays), "Mr Chidambaram War" (November 9, 2010); "Walking with the Comrades" (March 29, 2010), 1-26; "The Trickledown Revolution" (September 20, 2010), etc.].

[38] Niklas Swanström, "Globalisation and the Rise of Asia: Regional Cooperation to Sustain Economic Stability in Asia", in Ali Ahmed et al., eds., *Towards a New Asian Order* (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2012), 65-80.

variety of elements.[39] If, however, this categorisation is already problematic in the modern era, in the colonial and post-colonial periods, the *Hindutva* ideology is in this sense even more radical because it leads one to imagine a religious unity and homogeneity that the subcontinent has never had. The attempt by the right-wing to return tribal religion today to the embrace of the *Hindu dharm*, is clearly the prelude to a process of assimilation, homogenisation, simplification and annihilation of the very specific characteristics (such as shamanism and other religious peculiarities, for instance) which are the hallmarks of Adivasi identity.[40]

Despite this, the incorporation of Adivasis into what they regarded as a superior religion and culture has won the support to the cause of several communities in many central areas of India. Dalits and Adivasis have been given leadership positions at the lower level within the *Hindutva* organisation too, thus enhancing their self-respect and sense of their acceptance by upper castes.[41] Such propaganda in recent decades, although it has provided relative political results,[42] has led to further social tensions, attrition between groups and such unedifying episodes as anti-Christian pogroms.[43]

It is clear that today the administration of Modi, which appears to offer open-mindedness concerning the rights of tribal communities and towards the reserved forests, is trapped between the imperative of economic development and a strategy for tribal policy to be rethought from scratch. We cannot know where India will go to in the coming years, but we can imagine that, just as there were recently great debates as that about the origin of civilisation (Indus valley issue), or on the Islamic contribution to the history of India (culminated in the quarrel over Ayodhya), the next theme of great challenge will be the resolution of the question of Adivasi identity.

[39] Saraswati, who was a disciple of N.K. Bose, postulated a differentiation within an organic totality: Baidyanath Saraswati, "Tribe as Caste", in Dev Nathan, ed., *From Tribe to Caste* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1997), 114-116; see also Nirmal K. Bose, *Cultural Anthropology and Other Essays* (Calcutta: Indian Associated Publishing Company, 1953).

[40] Nivedita Menon and Aditya Nigam, *Potere e contestazione. L'India dal 1989* [2007] (Torino: EDT, 2009), 31.

[41] *Eamon Murphy,* "Politics, Religion, and the Making of Terrorism in Pakistan and India", in Randall D. Law, ed., *The Routledge History of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 361.

[42] Tariq Tachil, *Elite Parties, Poor Voters: How Social Services Win Votes in India* (New York: Cambridge U. P., 2014), 9, 282, 293.

[43] Cristophe Jaffrelot, "India: The Politics of (Re)Conversion to Hinduism of Christian Aboriginals", in Patrick Michel and Enzo Pace, eds., *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion: Volume 2. Religion and Politics* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 197-215.

Lata Singh and Biswamoy Pati, eds., *Colonial and Contemporary Bihar and Jharkhand* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2014), 256 pp., ISBN: 978-93-80607-92-4

Reviewed by **Mario Prayer**

The book is presented by the editors as a tribute to Papiya Ghosh in recognition of her pioneering study of colonial and post-colonial Bihar. The great variety of issues and areas covered by her works is aptly reflected in the different lines of enquiry, theories and methodologies which have inspired the authors of these twelve essays. The editors are themselves well-known scholars who have long engaged in the study of this ancient area located between the Himalayas and the Chotanagpur Plateau. With its unique geo-morphology and civilizational variety, Bihar makes a very attractive field of study, not least because of its marked political dynamism resulting, among other things, in the 'tribal' state of Jharkhand being carved out of its territory in 2000.

The opening chapters deal with the history of tribal societies in the region. Biswamoy Pati challenges the validity of certain received assumptions in historiography, particularly Ranajit Guha's idea of territoriality and David Arnold's hill-people/plains-people dichotomy. As illustrated through a long series of incidents, tribals of colonial Chotanagpur actually participated in several joint movements transgressing geographical and social barriers, e.g. the 1857 Mutiny, Munda's popular movements in the 1880s and 1890s, and the turmoil in the princely state of Gangpur in 1938-39. Moreover, issues affecting the entire region, such as land dispossession, famines and 'colonial Christianity' also provided a context where distinct communities found a common ground for mobilization.

At the other end of the spectrum, as it were, P.K. Shukla focuses on the colonial construct of 'village community' as a single, coherent unit and shows that in tribal Chotanagpur, the village was a mere 'creature of theory, a thing in the air' promoted by the colonial rulers in their self-projection as protectors of tribal villages against the onslaught of *dikus*, the alien intruders. Behind this stereotype there existed various forms of differentiation within tribal communities. Some of these forms were a constituent part of tribal society, whereas others were induced by the socio-economic upheavals caused by colonial expansion in the region.

Sanjukta Das Gupta's paper provides a comprehensive study of the tribals' attitude towards the *dikus* in colonial times. One of the interesting points raised in her study concerns the transformation of this relationship over time. While *dikus* did embody the notion of cultural and social otherness, at the initial stage of British expansion into Chotanagpur they lived within tribal communities as service groups in a symbiotic, complementary relationship. Later, however, cultural mistrust

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turned into pronounced hostility after colonialism had fundamentally altered the local economy and the very nature of tribal institutions, and outsiders in greater numbers began to acquire tribal lands and exploit tribals in various ways. Hinduised groups like Tantis, originally weavers, thus came to represent the disruption of a tribal world hard hit by colonial intervention.

Vinita Damodaran traces the specific impact of globalization and colonial capitalism on the environmental history of Chotanagpur in the 19th century. Particular stress is laid on the strategies adopted by tribal communities in response to the evil effects of colonial intervention – forest reservation, privatization of land, change in crop patterns, demographic imbalances. An innovative aspect of the study concerns the cultural and aesthetic dimension of the tribal interaction with the forest and with nature in general. This is a pertinent reminder that culture and economy should form closely interlinked domains in environmental history.

Shashank S. Sinha's study seeks to place recent cases of witch hunting in Jharkhand in a historical perspective. In pre-colonial times, tribal communities attributed serious illnesses and deaths to witchcraft. Contrary to *bonga*s or the spirits, witches could not be propitiated because of their inborn nature, and had to be killed. Under colonial rule, when witch killing was outlawed, and witchcraft began to be seen as a ritually acquired art, the imposition of fines and ostracism came to prevail over assassination. Things began to change once again after independence, when land dispossession and impoverishment in tribal regions led to a resurgence in witch killings. Witch hunting became a cover for motives such as the appropriation of resources, political intimidation, or the control of women.

Literary sources are prominent in Mrityunjay Prabhakar's and Imtiaz Ahmad's narrative of wider social phaenomena in times of crisis. Prabhakar illustrates the '*bidesia* culture' created by the 19th-century migration of indentured labourers to far-off lands, which involved about two million people from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Poems and songs are seen as expressing the collective memory of an emotional loss. Ahmad ponders over the absence of a literature of diaspora among Urdu-speaking Bihari Muslims over a long period of time, from India's Partition to the emergence of Bangladesh, and on to the recent migration to the Middle East, and points to the Patna poet Kalim Ajiz as one notable exception.

Two chapters by Dev N. Pathak and Sandali P. Sharma bring culture and society of Mithila to the fore. Pathak argues that the epistemological nexus currently found in anthropology and sociology between folklore and *purdah* has led to a misunderstanding of woman's position in family and society. He then goes on to analyse the texts of songs sung by Maithili speaking 'veiled women' in rural Bihar and finds in them an alternative system of knowledge combining 'resistance, redefinition and reconciliation', where the notions of *dharma*, *karma* and *moksha* are at the same time contested, re-elaborated and emotionally presented as shared cultural values. Sandali Sharma's ethnographic fieldwork on Madhubani art shows that the prevalent bias in academic and 'national' circles in favour of élitist styles

like *bharni* and *kachhni* has resulted in the marginalization of Dalit *gobar* and *godan* painters, along with their themes based on the stories of Raja Salhesa, Rahu and Ketu. As Sharma points out, while recent forms of market-driven hybridation by upper caste artists still retain an element of social and cultural discrimination, the *godan* style has become part of a process of resistance to Brahman and Kayasth dominance by Dusadh and other Dalit castes.

Lata Singh's essay explores the participation of subaltern and non-Congress groups in the Non-cooperation campaign of 1921-22, and disavows any clear demarcation between subaltern consciousness and mainstream nationalism. The assimilation and adaptation of nationalist ideology by the lower strata of society, in fact, points to a dialectical linkage between Gandhian nationalists and 'the masses with their problems'. An instructive case in point is the agitation within the subordinate ranks of the police, caught between their forced allegiance to an oppressive state and the counter-hegemonic struggle of non-cooperators.

The concluding chapters focus on electoral politics. Kamal Nayan Choubey analyses political representation from Bihar to the Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assembly from the early 1990s to 2005 and concludes that despite the post-Mandal emergence of a section of backward castes, lower groups remain marginalized and under-represented. Amit Prakash presents a study of the Jharkhand movement and traces the changing nature of autonomy and identity demands. Despite the presence of Jharkhandi contestants at the four general elections held during the 1990s, it was the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) who benefited from a clear promise of separate statehood along with the prospects of forming a government at the union level. In the following decade, BJP and Congress dominated the scene in turns, while regional parties suffered from internal division and the lack of a development agenda. Prakash concludes that the idea of Jharkhand in itself has so far been unable to contest the dominance of the Indian national state. This should prompt Jharkhandi formations to 'reinvent their relevance'.

All the papers in this volume do not meet the same standard and the quality of editing is at times unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, the range and relevance of the themes and the many insightful observations offered by the authors make this book a valuable contribution to our understanding of colonial and post-colonial Bihar and Jharkhand.

Megan Moodie, *We Were Adivasis: Aspiration in an Indian Scheduled Tribe* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 240 pp., ISBN: 978-0-22-625304-6

Reviewed by **Emilio Amideo**

Megan Moodie's *We Were Adivasis: Aspiration in an Indian Scheduled Tribe* is an ethnographic study of the Dhanka population of Jaipur, the capital of the largest Indian state of Rajasthan.

One of the tribal groups of India, the Dhanka are often referred to as ***adivāsis*** (from the Hindi words *adi* "original" and ***vāsi*** "one who dwells") a term that, in designating the autochthonous inhabitants of a given place, characterises them as the descendants of the original population of the subcontinent. Coined in the 1930s, the term ***adivāsi*** came to posthumously embody a sense of collective group belonging and inclusiveness against an 'outsider', as many Indian tribal groups underwent land dispossession and resisted exploitation under British colonialism.[1]

[1] Cf. David Hardiman, *The Coming of Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India* (New Delhi: Oxford U. P., 1987), 13-17.

Interestingly, as Moodie sustains, the Dhanka only refer to themselves as ***adivāsis*** in the past tense – as in the expression ***Hum adivāsis te*** meaning "we were adivasis" – and prefer to embrace the legal term of Scheduled Tribe (ST), as defined by the art. 366 of the Constitution of India. In Moodie's title, the location in the past of a collective identity (encapsulated by the expression "we were adivasis") seems to clash with the futurity embodied by the concept of 'aspiration', but it is precisely in the notion of ST that this tension is partially resolved. The embracing of the collective past of oppression and cruelty granted by their 'adivasiness' is in fact used by the Dhanka, Moodie maintains, only in order to claim the status of ST, which enables them to have access to certain government benefits and thus to pursue their aspiration to economic and cultural betterment:

> Scheduled Castes and Tribes are those groups designated as deserving and in need of special measures for their social uplift in recognition of their historical oppression by or isolation from the mainstream Hindu caste system. (8)

The recognition of being not only outside of the Hindu-Muslim fold but also outside of the caste system – and thus being characterised by a less rigid hierarchical social structure and by the lack of a permanent occupation – are among the prerequisites for being listed, or 'scheduled', as deserving state protection. Already contributing to the delineation of the Dhanka as a distinct cultural group, these features represent part of the requirements to attain tribal status, the others being: the presence of primitive traits, of geographic isolation, of

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shyness of contact with outsiders, and of backwardness. One of the main issues emerging from the book is therefore this ambiguous interconnection of Dhanka's capacity to aspire with a certain acceptance of a state of 'primitivism' and of constant 'need' for the intervention of the government. The aim of Moodie's study is precisely to delineate the Dhanka aspiration to social, economic and cultural uplift in the tension between the traditionalism, legally required by their status as ST, and their drive toward modernisation. Under this light "we were adivasis" is to be understood both as a reminiscence of their past oppression (and, as a consequence, their present 'deserving' measures of protection from the state) and as a recognition of the long road that they have already trodden toward their socio-economic uplift. In other words, the recognition of the 'primitivism' necessary for their continual economic and social betterment is strategically located in the past.

The book, composed of eight chapters followed by a glossary, is loosely divided into what Moodie calls the "era of service" – a more traditional timeframe in which an older generation of Dhanka men would take on government jobs in order to pursue social and economic uplift – and the more recent "era of contract", in which younger generations face the precariousness of employment in a more and more fragmented job market. The first two chapters introduce the Dhanka and describe their strategies to fulfil the historical requirements of the ST role. Among the lack of fixed occupation, the aspiration to social betterment, and the historical and contemporary oppression, these strategies involve the definition of the different jobs taken on by the Dhanka as 'clean' in opposition to the work of low castes, and above all the insistence on providing different accounts of their origin in order to resist an essentialist closure. The third chapter 'What It Takes' starts with Moodie's exchange with Ravi Lal Dhanka, a community elder whose coming of age took place within the "era of service" between the 1960s and the 1990s. In this chapter Moodie delineates the collective aspiration at the basis of what she calls Dhanka's "willingness" – an affect exclusively associated with masculinity – that consists in constantly moving, in working for the benefit of society and in doing "what it takes to survive in the face of poverty and powerlessness" (65). The feminine equivalent of masculine "willingness" is "respectability" and represents the subject of the fourth chapter: 'A Good Woman'. Dhanka women manifest their "respectability" by taking pride and care of the house, by wearing the veil in presence of their husbands' elder male relatives in order to protect the boundaries of approved sexual relationships, and by loving their husbands. The participation of women in the collective aspiration of the Dhanka occupies the private sphere and is therefore mainly achieved through marriage, which occupies the next two chapters of Moodie's study. The fifth chapter 'A Traffic in Marriage' is dedicated to the emergence of the *samuhik vivaha* or collective marriage: a practice which envisages public collective marriages organised by the members of the Dhanka community. The involvement of the community in the organisation of the *samuhik vivaha* enables the Dhanka not only to ensure a regulation of the dowries (which are

all set to the same moderate amount, with the potential extra costs covered through community donations), but also the respect of the legal age for brides to get married. It additionally grants every member of the community, regardless of disabilities, senility, or poverty, the possibility to get married. The *samuhik vivaha* epitomises the complexity of Dhanka identity in the tension between a strong traditional ritual character and the will to demonstrate Dhanka's progressive modernisation and their not being dependent on the help of the government.

Despite the fact that, as Moodie sustains, the "era of service" and the "era of contract" are not so neatly separable, the sixth chapter marks a slight movement to the "era of contract" with the new Dhanka generation entering adulthood. Entitled 'Wedding Ambivalence', it explains how, since marriage has become their only horizon of possibility, Dhanka women have to negotiate their individual aspiration and the community collective one. Often this means renouncing the interest in getting an education or seeking employment, activities that remain a male prerogative. The seventh chapter 'Of Contracts and Kaliyuga' focuses on the shift to the "era of contract" and the resulting threat of downward mobility that a younger generation of Dhanka men face in the context of precarious modern economies. In the last chapter, after setting her study in the background of the violent clashes between the Gujjars and the Rajasthani police in the summer of 2007 and 2008, Moodie reiterates the issue of Dhanka collective aspiration and how it inextricably intertwines intimate and political life. She thus explains how the expression "we were adivasis" comes to represent Dhanka's demand "to be both different and included, to leave the future undetermined in a not-yet, a hopeful *what if*, precisely because what is on offer from today's elites is found lacking" (176).

Moodie's ethnographic study is timely and responds well to a much needed intervention in the study of *Adivāsis*' historical and contemporary cultural manifestations. Her reading of Dhanka's strategies to collective aspiration is convincingly in communication with Arjun Appadurai's insight into the futurity of culture:

> … culture is a dialogue between aspiration and sedimented traditions. And in our commendable zeal for the latter at the cost of the former, we have allowed an unnecessary, harmful, and artificial opposition to emerge between culture and development.[2]

[2] Arjun Appadurai, "The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognitionin", in *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition* (London: Verso, 2013), 179-95, 195.

[3] Ibid., 180.

The common view of culture as something connected to the past – evident not only in words such as "habit, custom, heritage, tradition",[3] but also in the five parameters that, in defining the characteristic of a ST, point to "primitivism" and "backwardness" as specific 'cultural' traits – is strategically re-inscribed by the Dhanka, as Moodie suggests, in order to achieve a social and economic uplift. In other words, their embodying a partially essentialist conception of 'adivasiness'

does not confine them to the past, but serves as a propellant for their aspiration to a better future.

Moodie promises an intersectional discourse informed by the most recent scholarship on gender and social reform which remains slightly tangential and perhaps limited to the South Asian scholarship, but that nevertheless, by raising important questions concerning gender and identity negotiations, reveals the possibility for a fecund proliferation of further studies on the matter. Her idea of putting a "critical feminist ethnography at the heart of political practice" (181) promises a fruitful contamination of the field of cultural anthropology in the tension toward the politics of producing cultural change.

David Waterman, *Where Worlds Collide: Pakistani Fiction in the New Millennium* (Karachi: Oxford U. P., 2014), 260 pp., ISBN 978-0-19-940032-4

Reviewed by **Daniela Vitolo**

As a consequence of the fact that the first relevant group of Pakistani authors writing in English appeared only in recent times, their works still represent a new field of academic studies. Examining the Pakistani narrative written in English implies that, from the thematic point of view, the whole body of works that falls under the definition of Pakistani Anglophone fiction is characterised by a number of recurring elements. Indeed, the plots of the novels and short stories focus on historical events and current political facts showing how they affect the lives of the common man. Therefore, it seems that the authors aim at stimulating the readers to reflect on certain political and social issues. Like all the major studies on the subject, David Waterman's *Where Worlds Collide: Pakistani Fiction in the New Millennium* also develops around the central themes of history, politics, memory, nation and identity. It analyses the narratives written in English by Pakistani authors in the last fifteen years devoting each chapter to the discussion of novels by Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, Nadeem Aslam, H.M. Naqvi, Mohammed Hanif, Uzma Aslam Khan and Sorayya Khan. Meanwhile, the last chapter moves from Kamila Shamsie's essay *Offence: The Muslim Case* to provide a brief history of the events that have determined the life of Pakistan and to restate one of the main points of the book. It claims that in such a literary production the inseparable relationship between history and narrative is manifested in the fact that the second is "very often fiction informed by history and operating as social critique" (15).

In the introduction the author distinguishes between a 'first wave' of writers, constituted by Bapsi Sidhwa and Sara Suleri, and a 'second wave', which is the object of his work. While, on the one hand, Waterman analyses the novels as a powerful means to deal with a common memory that is at the foundations of today's Pakistan, on the other hand, he looks at the ways in which other contemporary issues – like migrations and the role of Islam in politics and society – are dealt with in fiction. According to the author, the *trait d'union* between novels based on different themes is the family, not only because individual lives are always influenced by the family network, but also because the family appears as a metaphor for the nation. "The story of the family", he writes, "is ultimately the story of Pakistan; the two cannot be separated, and given that much of contemporary Pakistani fiction is historical fiction, the family is ultimately the foundation of the history of Pakistan" (5). Therefore, it seems that *Where Worlds Collide* chooses as *fil rouge* of the book the issue of the relationship between history

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and individual life experiences, as they are lived inside family contexts. However, it seems difficult for the reader to trace such a *fil rouge* within the work. It also seems that the author uses the term 'history' when he refers both to the still-open questions arising from the past and to a series of political issues pertaining to a contemporary phase. Another point that emerges from the approach chosen by Waterman is that the issues related to history and politics, represented through the perspective of individuals and their family networks, is always related to questions concerning personal or collective identity. Indeed, as the studies conducted on the subject have frequently pointed out, Pakistan's identity crisis is one of the main issues that subdue the whole literary production. It seems, in fact, that the social criticism of the novelists refer both to Pakistani and Western society, and is related to a need to discuss the personal and the collective Pakistani identity.

Waterman proceeds in the dissection of the narrative works using a rich amount of theoretical tools. The presence of so many references to varied theories and theoretical fields does not simply allow the author to support his assertions, but also opens to further reflections about the novels. Notwithstanding, at times the theoretical references are simply touched upon and the reader might find it difficult to contextualise them within the discourse. As this might affect the reader's complete comprehension of the text, the same thing can be said about the fact that at some points a reader not acquainted with the works discussed, might have some difficulty at understanding the plot of the novels. As Muneeza Shamsie notices in the forward to the book, the chapters concerning the literary works are not arranged according to a grouping that might have a chronological base. At the same time, it seems that neither are the chapters organised following a thematic logic nor do they follow any other clear structure. As a consequence, on the one hand, the whole work can appear to lack a solid structure that the author might have determined in finding deeper connections among the novels. For example, he might have chosen to look at the ways in which different forms of border crossings, frequently related to political events, contribute to the shaping of identities. On the other hand, as Muneeza Shamsie says, this can allow the author to "interwave ... broader linkages of concept, perception and identity" (x) thus constituting a possible base for further studies.

As Waterman focuses on the frequently discussed relationship between history, family and identity, his book undeniably introduces new points in the discussion of such issues. Notwithstanding, as the author himself says in the introduction, Pakistani literature in English offers more food for thought. As the most evident elements emerging from this narrative have been analysed in several works and will be focus of new discussions, new studies might move beyond this evident network of related issues to explore other questions that can be found in these same narrative. For example, they could focus more on how gender issues are treated or on the ways in which the novels depict the construction of personal and communal identities as related to urban spaces. Above all, Waterman's study analyses the

Anglophone narrative as detached from the literary context within which it has been produced, thus following the path opened by other previous works. Nevertheless, it seems necessary at this point to begin to study such narratives within a broader perspective. Given the rich number of literary traditions developed in the different languages spoken in Pakistan, both the 'first wave' and the 'second wave' of writers should be placed within the local literary context. Furthermore, it would be useful to look at the Pakistani fiction in English within an historical perspective. It would mean not only to discuss how it has developed since its beginnings, but also to consider in which manners it has been influenced by other past literary traditions and movements.

Valérie Baisnée, "*Through the long corridor of distance": Space and Self in Contemporary New Zealand Women's Autobiographies* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014), pp. xxvii+156, ISBN: 978-9-04-203868-4

Reviewed by **Tamara Iaccio**

The French scholar and women's autobiographies expert Valérie Baisnée brings a new perspective on autobiographies with this work on New Zealand women writers, which stands out from other studies of the genre for its focus on the concepts of self and space as features of the 'sense of identity' projected by autobiographies (x). The study brings together for the first time the works of Janet Frame, Fiona Kidman, Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Laurie Edmond, Ruth Park, Barbara Anderson and Ruth Dallas, all published in a time-frame that goes from the 1980s up to 2008. As Baisnée states, this time-frame has been chosen not only because in those years a new interest in autobiography as literary genre emerged in New Zealand, but also, and more specifically, because of the rising of a new female awareness. Baisnée's study is, in fact, "firmly anchored in a feminist framework" (129) with regards to New Zealand women and their discovery of their own potential, both as women and as writers.

The work consists of five chapters that follow the lead of the 'journey' trope ushered in by the "Introduction", as each chapter is named after a place or a space that can be found in the works analysed: "Threshold", "Homes", "Displaced Bodies, Disembodied Texts", "Landscapes" and "Itineraries". As the chapters unfold, the reader is gently guided on a path which leads from one section to the next: the topics discussed in the first chapter lead to the following topics in the next, creating a flawless journey made of 'spaces' (physical, mental, cultural) that finds its destination in the "Conclusions".

In the "Introduction", also divided into five paragraphs, Baisnée identifies some core issues that will be covered extensively throughout the chapters, starting with an overview of the concepts of place and space across history and disciplines and of how the two have acquired an increasing relevance in all fields, whence derives the interest to investigate these concepts in autobiographies. The chosen time-frame of the study is particularly relevant, due to the changes which took place in New Zealand especially during the 1970s and 1980s, when issues regarding land, race and gender were brought out, following the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s (xxiv). History shows how diverse female experience is and an autobiographical account, with its personal point of view, is bound to present this

diversity (xxi). As the French scholar points out, the 'personal' has always a major political impact on the writing, and this is especially true for women, who are often relegated to a marginal position in the society, in their families and in their profession, and are therefore never allowed to stand up and express themselves (101). The subjectivity of the writer is indeed the primal focus of the study: in order to investigate its presence in the self-narrative, Baisnée employs space and place considering the two concepts complementary one to another; drawing on Michel de Certeau's use of the terms, she writes: "place implies fixed positions … space is characterised by movement" (xxi). The 'fixed position' of the place is perceived as a personal concept, for it is experienced by the subject and, therefore, it carries with it personal memories (xxi). In this perspective, "narratives are thus the interplay of places and spaces" (xxi). But, as the French scholar emphasises, an autobiographical work is also a cultural and ideological presentation of a writer since "the self deployed in these autobiographies is embodied and located culturally and socially" (129).

In the first chapter, "Threshold", by quoting both Gérard Genette's and Umberto Eco's definitions (1-2), Baisnée introduces the concept of the liminal space that "perform(s) an important function for the reception of the text" (1): the 'paratext'. Considering the paratext as a threshold makes one aware that its crossing signs the entering into another (wider) space. This topic also serves as a threshold for the rest of the chapter, as Baisnée performs an 'external' examination of the chosen autobiographies, starting from their titles, where is common the use of metaphors that arouse curiosity in the reader and break with the tradition of using the term 'autobiography' in titles (6), as in the case of *To the Is-land*, by Janet Frame, or *Hot October*, by Lauris Edmond. Baisnée then moves to a discussion of epigraphs, forewords and incipits; she underlines their function as places where the narrative begins and in which there can be found the recurrent topoi of a narrative of the self: birth, trauma, death and identity. The commonest trope of the autobiographical genre, "life as a journey", hinted in the title of the study, is thoroughly discussed and analysed in a dedicated paragraph. By the end of the chapter the reader is accustomed to the image of 'in and out' that recurs in the study.

The last sentence of the first chapter introduces the following section: "the thresholds of autobiography logically lead to the entrance to a home, the space within which women do not fit as neatly as they are supposed to" (23). The connection of the sentence with the title of the second chapter, "Homes", carries the reader seamlessly into an exploration of the trope of home in five autobiographies, providing the perspective of the writer and, more importantly, of the woman behind the writer. As Baisnée's analysis underlines, what Gaston Bachelard defines as "archetype of space" (27) is often depicted as a contested zone, incompatible with the artistic life (54). Women either have to negotiate the space of home or have to accept its limitations, but home is a place that, even in

the imagined world of the narrative, makes the coexistence of the woman and the writer unconceivable, and this ultimately produces a feeling of displacement, both physical and mental.

This feeling of displacement is the focus of the third chapter, "Displaced Bodies, Disembodied Texts", which examines three writers' narratives – Frame, Edmond and Kidman – about the 'rites of passage' (57) in a woman's life (menarche, loss of virginity, pregnancy, childbirth and abortion). As the title suggests, the chapter looks at the representation of the female body in self-narratives, since "bodies are our most private home, as well as the most public" (57). It is through the body that we experience space, for it acts as a link between the self and the outside. But the outside is layered with places (social, political, personal, etc.), which have each its own rules, by which a woman has to abide. Baisnée also stresses how, for a woman, every mention of the body carries with it political references that might become a tool of subjection – for women in general and feminist discourse in particular (59); the analysis of the autobiographies shows how the body is made visible or invisible as a reflection of woman's status in society (60). After an examination of the main issues regarding the body in self-narration, the chapter ends with a comparison of the three autobiographies selected.

In the fourth chapter Baisnée directs her attention to geography, more specifically to "Landscapes", the relevance of which in self-narratives is evident, for they are repository of personal meanings, and, as Baisnée underlines, they are "cultural and political products" (79). The texts examined in this section are those of Ruth Dallas (1991) and Fiona Kidman (2008), who wrote their works in different periods and were located at the extremities of New Zealand. Despite their differences, for both writers landscape triggers memories that, in turn, produce writing. For New Zealanders, landscapes are an important part of their identity, as Baisnée shows with an overview of landscape studies in New Zealand, in which she explores the evolution of the idea of landscape for the artists, to whom the connection with the landscape proves to be so strong that eventually they are left with "a sense of belonging to the landscape rather than to the people" (83). Comparing the two autobiographies Baisnée proves that places have been internalized by the writers, who feel both their 'present' and especially their 'colonial past': New Zealand places, in fact, not only carry personal memories, but they still bear the echo of the trauma of colonialism. The narrative picture of landscapes describes the perception of the authors, their own view and experiences of places; the 'national' understanding of the place is ignored, whilst the *memory* of colonialism appears much more relevant, due to its repercussions in the writers lives.

If geography and landscapes contribute to the formation of the writer's identity, the fifth chapter of Baisnée's study, "Itineraries", examines the social and literary space of each writer in New Zealand to analyse the construction of the self-image

as writer within the self-narrative. Baisnée employs a methodology largely based on the work of the sociologists Bourdieu and Lahire, whose different views of the relationship between the writer and literature open to a set of possibilities when it comes to defining the self (98). In Baisnée's view, the general attitude for women writers was to separate their working/artistic life from their 'real' one (as wives, mothers, etc.), in a dualism that was shaped by the society they lived in. Their identity is therefore always under construction, especially within writing, the place in which "narrators re-interpret their memories and organise episodes to construct an identity over time" (102). Focusing on the women writers' education, Baisnée devotes a paragraph to the act of reading, which is the first approach to writing and the first pillar in the construction of their identity as writers: reading made the young writers realize that New Zealand was excluded from the world of English literature (mainly European) and created a sense of 'pioneering' in those who approached writing. "New Zealand women writers' self-image is constructed in a void, with the archetypal writers represented as a male European or American adult" (107). This perspective explains why New Zealand writers described the act – or even the aspiration – of writing as something "done against all odds" (108). After the investigation of the other factors that threatened the realisation of a career in writing (economical conditions, general recognition for the 'status' of writer – usually acquired through being a protégée of a well known male writer), the chapter ends with a brief overview of the competition that spread among the writers under analysis and their reaction to other women's fortune compared to their own.

In the "Conclusions" Baisnée stresses the relevance of the self-narrative as a mine of information about writing, the self and the space as it is experienced and interiorised by the female writer. Throughout the study the reader is constantly reminded of the feminist perspective adopted in the search for a female identity, which, in accordance to what Stuart Hall writes about all identites, depends on closure (112); the space in which the self exists and operates is a narrow one, hence the displacement felt by each woman writer every time she has to locate herself in a wider context. This idea is reinforced by the constant use of 'the liminal' in space, the thresholds and the margins, which appear to be the only spaces in which a woman can express herself.

Ultimately, liminal spaces are the primary focus of Valérie Baisnée's study. The margins of a book, the margins of literature, the margins of the world, the margins of social life; every topic discussed has its borders. This recalls the metaphor of the journey, which is not only appropriate for autobiographical work and suitable for writing and for Baisnée's study, but is also right to describe the experience of her reader, who is invited to explore a genre that has been marginalised for too long.

Since Baisnée started her dissertation talking about margins, it seems particularly fitting to end this review with the same image. It goes without saying that, for readers, the cover of a book gives the first impression of the book itself,

although it sometimes is overlooked or taken for granted. As a matter of fact, in many cases nobody pays the cover the attention it deserves. Baisnée knows how important this first contact between reader and book is, as she explains when discussing the "paratext". The reader is solicited by the book to take a closer look at the cover: the picture on the front shows, in both its background and in close-up, the back of a woman walking through a narrow corridor. The two women are dressed differently. The back cover presents the same image, Stephane Ouradou's *Le Tunnel*, in mirror symmetry. Opening the book with the two covers side by side, each picture appears as the mirror reflection of the other. Even though this hint might be lost on the reader at first, through the reading of the book the relationship between cover and topics discussed becomes more evident, so that the cover turns out to be a perfect 'para-text'. For, the book (the text) is divided into five chapters. So is its "Introduction" (the paratext). After reading Baisnée's book, and after the examination of the cover, this cannot be considered a coincidence. Also, throughout the study the metaphor of the mirror is the most recurrent. From the cover to the last chapter the reader is always presented with a 'reflection' or mirror image: the front cover mirroring the back cover, the introduction mirroring the chapters, and so on for space/place, New Zealand writers/European writers, identity/memory, inner self/outer self. Every topic introduced by Baisnée has its counterpart, its reflection. Using the concept of space as compass the reader finds a new way for reading an autobiography, while the metaphor of the mirror that the French scholar masterfully employs makes the reader look at self, space and writing as being a reflection of one's experience of the world.

Reading Valérie Baisée's study in this way brings to mind what the law of physics states about two bodies that cannot occupy the same space at the same time. A limited space, such as a text, can defy this rule, occupying, through reflections, multiple places at the same time.

Emilio Amideo is a Ph.D. student in Literary, Linguistic and Comparative Studies at the University of Naples "L'Orientale", where he is currently researching about contemporary black queer narratives as 'theory in the flesh' or embodied politics of resistance, with the aim of tracing a possible black queer aesthetics. For his BA and MA degrees dissertations he has focused respectively on the analysis of the linguistic representation of 'racial otherness'; in the British Press and on issues of gender and 'race' performativity in Afro-diasporic literary and visual productions. Over the years he has spent several research periods abroad, to include a period of study at Goldsmiths University of London (UK) in 2009 and at the British Library (UK) in 2012. In 2015 he was Visiting Pre-doctoral Fellow at Northwestern University (USA) to conduct research for his Ph.D. dissertation which will be completed in 2017.

Imran Amin successfully completed and has been awarded his Ph.D. on his thesis titled *Conflict and the Democratic State in Bihar and Jharkhand* from Centre for study of Law and Governance at Jawaharlal Nehru University in 2016. Using genealogical and ethnographic methods, his thesis looked at the rationality and practice of governmental power in the governance of violent conflicts. For his M. Phil degrees dissertations he has focused on the analysis of on the political economy of violence in Jharkhand's development. Over the years he has spent several research periods in the field and is currently doing action research of development practice at Centre for Development Practice, Ambedkar University Delhi.

Peter B. Andersen is Associate Professor at the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies at the University of Copenhagen. His research in India and the west is centred on modernisation of religion. He has undertaken extensive fieldwork, interviews, and archival studies in India and survey studies in the West. His Ph.D. concerned the shift from oral to printed transmission of culture and religion among the Santals in India. His publications include: *From Fire Rain to Rebellion: Reasserting Ethnic Identity through Narrative*, edited and translated by Peter B. Andersen, Marine Carrin, & Santosh K. Soren (2011) and *Halfdan Siiger: The Bodo of Assam – Revisiting a Classical Study from 1950*, edited by Peter B. Andersen and Santosh Soren (2015).

Stefano Beggiora is Researcher in History of India and lecturer in Vernacular Literature of India and Ethnography of Shamanism in the Department of Asian and North African Studies at the University Ca' Foscari Venice, where he received his Ph.D. in 2006. He conducted extensive fieldwork missions and specializes in South-Asian shamanism and Indian tribal religions and society. Dr. Beggiora has published several articles, chapters and books on Indian adivasis (Saoras, Kondhs, Apatanis, Monpas, etc.), colonial history, Constitutional framework and laws for safeguarding the Scheduled Tribes and Castes, Contemporary History of political movements of India.

Marine Carrin, Directrice de Recherche émérite (CNRS), LISST Centre d'Anthropologie (CAS) Université de Toulouse Jean Jaurès, is the author of *La Fleur et l'Os* (1986); *Enfants de la Déesse* (1997): co-author of *A Peripheral Encounter,* on missionaries among the Santals (with H. Tambs-Lyche, 2008) and *From Fire Rain to Rebellion,* Santal texts translated with P. Andersen and S. Soren (2011). She has co-edited *Tribus et Basses Castes*, Purusartha, (with C. Jaffrelot, 2002) and *People of the Jangal* (with H. Tambs-Lyche, 2008) *Voices from the Periphery: Subalternity and Empowerment* (with L. Guzy, 2012), and *The Politics of Ethnicity in India, Nepal and China* (with P. Kanungo and G. Toffin, 2014). She has a book in press on Santal Ritual Discourse.

Rossella Ciocca is Professor of English and Anglophone Literatures at the University of Naples "L'Orientale". She has published books and essays on early modern literature and

culture, Shakespeare, colonial and post-colonial history and literature. Her recent research interests lie in the area of the contemporary Indian novel in English and in translation. Her recent works include essays on the Partition of India, Mumbai novels, tribal literature and a volume co-edited with Neelam Srivastava *Indian Literature and the World. Multilingualism, Translation and the Public Sphere* (Palgrave Macmillan) currently in print.

Sanjukta Das Gupta is an Associate Professor at the Dipartimento Istituto Italiano di Studi Orientali, Sapienza Università di Roma, Italy. She had earlier served as Associate Professor in the Department of History, Calcutta University, India, and was an Associate Editor of *The Calcutta Historical Journal*. Her research interests include agrarian and environmental history, and the social history of colonial India. She has published extensively in academic journals and edited volumes and has co-edited *Narratives of the Excluded: Caste Issues in Colonial India* (2008) and *Narratives from the Margins: Aspects of Adivasi History in India* (2012). She is the author *of Adivasis and the Raj: Socio-economic Transition of the Hos, 1820-1932* (2011). Currently she is co-editing (with Gunnel Cederlöf) a volume on *Subjects, Citizens, and Law: Colonial and Postcolonial India.*

Giuseppe De Riso is a lecturer in English Literature at the University of Naples "L'Orientale", where he completed his Ph.D. in Cultural and Postcolonial Studies of the Anglophone World. He has authored the monograph *Affective Maps and Bio-mediated Bodies in Tridimensional Videogames of the Anglophone World*, and essays on Indian novels such as "When Narration is Made Flesh. An Affective Reading of Geetanjali Shree's *The Empty Space*" and "Performare la nazione indiana: i corpi grottechi nella narrativa di Salman Rushdie". He is currently investigating the literary representation of violence in South Asia in the complex nexus between art, politics, technology and the media.

Ganesh N. Devy is a renowned literary critic and activist for the human and cultural rights of Adivasis in India. He is the founder director of the *Bhasha Research and Publication Center* and *Adivasi Academy* at Tejgadh (Gujarat) established to create a unique educational environment for tribal communities. He led the *People's Linguistic Survey of India* in 2010, which has researched and documented 780 living Indian languages. Formerly professor of English at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, among his many academic assignments, he has held fellowships at Leeds, Yale and Jawaharlal Nerhu Universities. Along with Laxman Gaikwad and Mahasweta Devi, he is one of the founders of "The Denotified and Nomadic Tribes Rights Action Group".

Tamara Iaccio is a Ph.D. student in English Studies at the University of Naples "L'Orientale". Her research aims to investigate the representations of space and place in the narratives of exile in contemporary English-language literatures, with a focus on multi-cultural identity, national vs. cultural identity and cultural memory. Her other research interests include displacement, representation of history, narrative theories, language and geography.

Elida K. U. Jacobsen is a Senior Researcher at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). She is also the Academic Manager of the undergraduate course in Peace and Conflict Studies by Oslo and Akershus University College which takes place in Pondicherry, India. Her current research is situated in critical security studies, postcolonial studies, gender studies and peace and development research. Jacobsen is interested in empirically grounded studies of the relationship between governing rationales and forms of appropriation in everyday security practice.

Mara Matta holds a Ph.D. in South and East Asian Studies from the University of Naples "L'Orientale". She is currently a researcher in South Asian Studies at "Sapienza" Università di Roma where she teaches Modern Literatures of the Indian Subcontinent, and is a member of the Archive of Migrant Memories (AMM, Rome) and of the Network for the

Promotion of Asian Cinema (NETPAC, Colombo and Delhi). She has published extensively on her field of research.

Tehezeeb Moitra is currently a third year doctoral candidate in *Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Comparati* at the L'Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale", where she also teaches and lectures on English language and literature. She has Masters degrees in English Literature from Saint Louis University, Madrid Campus and Contemporary Art from the Sotheby's Institute of Art in London. Her research interests include Postcolonial Studies, Linguistics, Gender Studies and Contemporary Art Theory and Criticism; she has published several articles and essays on the same.

Felix Padel is an independent researcher. He did his first degree in classics (ancient Greek and Roman history, literature, philosophy) at Oxford University; an M.Phil in Sociology at Delhi School of Economics, India, and doctorate in Social Anthropology at Oxford. His main books include *Sacrificing People: Invasions of a Tribal Landscape* (1995, 2010), *Out of This Earth: East India Adivasis and the Aluminium Cartel* (with Samarendra Das, 2010), *Ecology, Economy: Quest for a Socially Informed Connection* (with Ajay Dandekar and Jeemol Unni, 2013). During 2012-14 he was Professor of Rural Management at the Indian Institute of Health Management Research, Jaipur, and during 2015-16 he held had various visiting positions at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Amit Prakash is Professor at the Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He is the author of *Jharkhand: Politics of Development of Identity* (2001) and *Politics and Internal Security* (2004). He has co-edited *Local Governance in India: Decentralisation and Beyond*, (2006). His areas of research include politics of development and identity, critical governance studies, conflict, governance and the state, democratic political process in India, policing in India, and, global governance.

Mario Prayer is an Associate Professor at the Dipartimento Istituto Italiano di Studi Orientali, Sapienza University of Rome. He teaches modern and contemporary Indian history. His research mainly deals with cultural, social and political aspects of 20th century Bengal, and with the Indo-Italian intercourse in the inter-war period. He is the author of *The 'Gandhians' of Bengal: Nationalism, Social Reconstruction and Cultural Orientations, 1890-1942* (Rome: Bardi 2001) and has published widely in various international volumes and journals. He has co-authored a course of Bengali for Italian students and has translated works by Manik Bandopadhyay and Rabindranath Tagore into Italian.

Rukmani is a research scholar at Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, JNU, New Delhi. She has recently submitted her Ph.D. research titled "State Capacity and Development: A Comparative Study of Jharkhand and Uttarakhand" which aims to analyze the importance of institutions of governance and their functionaries by focusing on the infrastructural and administrative capacity of the state. The study argues that though socio- and physical factors have a profound impact on the development process of a state, what matters most is the quality of institutions of governance. For her M.Phil Dissertation she has analysed the impact of decentralization on forest resources and patterns of interaction between the institutions created at the third tier of government. Over the years she has spent several research periods in the field and some of her papers have been selected for presentation in various universities across India and abroad.

Daniel Rycroft is Senior Lecturer in the Arts and Cultures of Asia and Chair of the India Dialogue, University of East Anglia, UK. He specialises in anthropological history and cultural heritage studies. In 2005 he directed and co-produced a film documentary on the collective memory of the Santal rebellion, entitled *Hul Sengel: The Spirit of the Santal Revolution*. His publications include *Representing Rebellion: Visual Aspects of Counter-Insurgency in Colonial India* (2006) and a co-edited Routledge volume on *The Politics of Belonging in India:*

Becoming Adivasi (2011). He was founding Editor of World Art (Routledge journals, www.tandf.co.uk/journals/RWOR), has recently edited *World Art and the Legacies of Colonial Violence* (2013), and is currently preparing a monograph on anthropological ideas in pre-independence India.

Shashank S. Sinha is an independent researcher. He holds a Ph.D. in History from the University of Delhi, India, has taught history at Deshbandhu College at the University of Delhi. He has authored *Restless Mothers and Turbulent Daughters: Situating Tribes in Gender Studies* (2005) and is now working on a manuscript on the "Politics of Witch Hunting in Eastern India (1850s to 1913)". He has earlier worked with Oxford University Press and is currently Publishing Director, Routledge (South Asia).

Daniela Vitolo is a Ph.D. student at the Department of Literary, Linguistic and Comparative Studies of the University of Naples "L'Orientale". During her BA she has studied English and Spanish languages and literatures and throughout her MA she has focused on the study of postcolonial literatures in English. She is currently researching about Pakistani literature in English. Her study analyses contemporary fiction in the mirror of postcolonial theories focusing on the relationship between physical or symbolic border-crossings and the processes of personal and communal identity formation. She has published the essay "The Performance of Identity in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*"; (2016) in the journal *Transnational Literature*.