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CONTENTS

Looking Beyond the Present: The Historical Dynamics of Adivasi (Indigenous and Tribal) Assertions in India–Part II

Daniel J. Rycroft

Lecturer in South Asian Arts and Culture, School of World Art Studies and Museology, University of East Anglia, UK

Abstract

This essay is organized into two parts that describe some of the important conceptual, historical and representational issues that relate to Adivasi assertion. The first part, 'Adivasis' as 'Indigenous and Tribal Peoples', summarizes the key conceptual and semantic debates that have enabled Adivasis to assert themselves as Indigenous peoples internationally and nationally. This paves the way for a fuller engagement with the topic of Reinterpreting Adivasi History. Here I reflect upon a statement made about 'looking beyond the present' by Shibu Soren, a leading Santal politician, to question how and why movements led by Adivasi freedom-fighters sustain discourses of indigeneity in postcolonial India. The second part, on the ICITP (Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples), links up the previous strands, to assess how this indigenist organization has developed a reading of Indigenous rights as relating to history, in a range of representational contexts.

Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples

Defining the trajectories and challenges of the new indigenism in India today, organisations such as the Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ICITP) bring into close dialogue the local, regional, zonal, national and international dimensions of Adivasi discourse. The organisation is a network of one hundred and fifty affiliated Adivasi cultural organisations and political action groups, and is made effective by positioning itself

i) in rhetorical terms, between the Adivasi people and the nation-state,

ii) in strategic terms, between the new international indigenous forums, the federal states, and the nation state and

iii) in discursive terms, between the politics of cultural activism and the shifting cultures of democracy in postcolonial India.

The organisation covers India through zonal (transregional) committees: Central, South, Northwest, Northeast, Southeast, Delhi. Comprising sixty member organisations– including the *Adivasi Ekta Munch* (Lohardaga), the *Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Vikas Parishad* (Gumla), the All India Santal Welfare and Cultural Society (Dumka), and the

World Santal Students Confederation (Kolkata), the Central zone has the strongest representation. The key aim of ICITP is to represent the wide-ranging political and cultural concerns of Adivasis vis-à-vis the federal states. By exposing the exploitative agendas of the states' development actors and by pressing for indigenous autonomy in international forums, ICITP has utilised international instruments such as the International Labour Organisation, the United Nations Working Group for Indigenous Populations, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and the Minority Rights Group (Munda 2002; Whall 2003: 635-59 states the case for inter-governmental intervention in the domain of Indigenous Rights). Implementing a development model of Adivasi self-empowerment through capacity enhancement networks, ICITP enables marginalised communities to access the legal frameworks that the federal states ignore in their efforts to disenfranchise the people (Mardi 2004: 1-3). Whilst the discourse of indigeneity in India previously revolved around claims to regional autonomy in areas that had been historically dominated (i.e. before colonialism) by indigenous and tribal communities, nowadays the discursive and political emphasis of organisations like ICITP focuses on:

i) on self-determination in the form of Adivasi Self Rule and decentralised power (Mundu 2002).

ii) solidarity between Adivasis throughout the nation, via media campaigns and civil action (Sawaiyan 2002).

iii) globalising the network of resistance, to include diasporic Adivasis, pro-Adivasi activists and Indigenous Peoples outside South Asia. Whilst these shifts are sustained by the Cultural Rights and Human Rights agenda of international bodies such as the United Nations and the International Labour Organisation, they are also driven by a radical reinterpretation of Indigenous and Tribal history in South Asia, a point which is often ignored in current anthropologies.[1]

During the recent symposium on Indigenous Education at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Dr Ram Dayal Munda (the Chief Advisor to ICITP, and longstanding Jharkhandi activist) and Sukanti Hembrom of the Jharkhandi Organsiation for Human Rights (JOHAR) debated the tensions between History education in mainstream schools, Adivasi perception of their pasts, and the assertion of minority histories: 'India basically having an assimilationist policy as far as its minority population is concerned is reluctant to recognise the distinctive features of Indigenous tribal history. For instance, the history books have 1857 as the beginning of the freedom movement of the country whereas in fact the history of resistance against the British in the Indigenous and tribal areas is nearly one hundred years earlier as can be ascertained by the movement of Tilka Manjhi of Jharkhand, Bengal presidency in the early 1780s. In the same manner the practice of democracy (village republic) is a gift of the Indigenous tribal peoples to India.'[2] The reinterpretation of Adivasi pasts as assertions of Adivasi Self Rule can be understood as a critique of United Nations Permanent Forum that does

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[1] Notable exceptions are (Baviskar 1997), who details how the activists of the *Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath* relate the historical actions of heroes such as Chitu Kirad and Motia Bhil to contemporary agitations, and Sundar 1997, who recovers the popular memory of the anti-colonial movements in the Bastar area of Chhatisgarh.

[2] JOHAR and ICITP, 'Joint Statement', *UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues: Agenda item 3b, Education* (unpublished), 16-27 May 2005.

not cover issues of Indigenous and Tribal Self Governance, preferring issues such as Health, Environment and Education. This critique is expanded and redirected towards the nation-state and federal states in India through the 8th recommendation put forward during the permanent forum on Indigenous education by ICITP: 'States must recognise the need to carry forward oral traditions of IPs [Indigenous Peoples]/Tribal Peoples (Adivasis) to ensure that the transmission of oral knowledge is not disturbed or even distorted. The use of convergence media, audiovisual technology should be promoted for the transmission and dissemination of Oral knowledge and Oral History and its documentation for future generations.'[3]

The interface between a reinterpretation of Adivasi history and a critique of state educational policies can be assessed well in relation to the historical consciousness that has been generated by the legacy of the *Santal Hul* of 1855-56. Although Ram Dayal Munda cited Tilka Manjhi's movement against colonial oppression in the permanent forum, it is the *Hul*–which started just two years before the 1857 wars of Independence–that is often recovered by Adivasi activists as a means to contest the dominant national narrative surrounding the freedom movement.[4] Radically effecting colonial policies on 'Aboriginals', the Hul is represented as a national movement, not on account of its size or scope, but because it established (temporarily) an indigenous and democratic alternative to colonial rule. The mass mobilisation of 1855-56 was led by two Adivasi brothers–Sido Murmu and Kanhu Murmu–against the British East India Company and their agents in the districts surrounding the Rajmahal Hills in what was then Bengal province. Since Adivasi activists began to reinterpret the mobilisation in the context of Jharkhandi regionalism in the 1960s and 1970s, and Subaltern scholars began to re-think the significance of this and other Adivasi movements in the 1980s, the Hul is no longer perceived by Adivasis and leftists as a minor event the long history of India's freedom struggle. Rather, it is interpreted as the first war for Indigenous rights, which continues to be fought along any available democratic avenues as federal States continue to oppress Adivasis in the name of national development. Sido and Kanhu's *parwanas* (orders) issued to the colonial police and landowners speak of the new rule of Santals, as assumed on June 30th 1855 (Areeparampil 2002: 148-52). As an elected *Manjhi* (headman), Sido received divine sanction to form a Santal-led governing body that united the subaltern workers and all Adivasis against the colonial state and regional elites. The memorial practices that commemorate this revolutionary movement also enshrine this notion of indigenous autonomy, i.e. Adivasi Self Rule, and speak in present and future tenses (like Banerjee's archival voices), to suggest that the anti-colonial past and the globalised present interpenetrate in ways that resist conventional representation (Rycroft 2005).

In the year 2005, the 150th anniversary of the Hul, ICITP's critiques of the United Nations Permanent Forum and of the states' educational policies in India gain a special significance. To commemorate the anniversary, a year-long project has been set up to re-assess the significance of Adivasi history in political and academic arenas. Convened by Dominic Mardi (the Secretary General of ICITP), and Daniel Rycroft (Research Fellow at the University of Sussex), *Santal Hul 150: An International Forum Recognising the*

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[3] JOHAR and ICITP, 2005 based on the resolutions passed at the Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples' Consultation on Education, Guwahati, Assam, 26 February to 1 March 2005.

[4] This is one of the main trajectories of the film 'Hul Sengel'.

150th Anniversary of the Santal Rebellion, in 2005 aims to engage widespread interest in the ongoing legacy of the *Hul* amongst international researchers, Adivasi networks and minority rights activists.[5] As part of this forum international conferences have already been hosted on 'Jharkhand Today' by Peter Andersen at the University of Copenhagen, on 'Reinterpreting Adivasi (Indigenous Peoples) Movements in South Asia' by Daniel Rycroft at the University of Sussex and on 'Hul to Separate State: 150 Years of Peoples Movements in Jharkhand' by Sanjay Bosu Mullik of the Bindrai Institute for Research Study and Action (BIRSA, Ranchi).[6] Other related conferences were held in November 2005 at Visva Bharati University Santiniketan), Jadavpur University (Kolkata) and the Asiatic Society of Bengal (Kolkata). Numerous other educational events are being organised in district centres by the National and Zonal Coordination Committees of *Santal Hul 150 Forum*, each providing delegates with an excellent opportunity to share ideas, and publish material in Adivasi languages.

The 150th anniversary was celebrated at Bhognadih village, the home of Sido Murmu and Kanhu Murmu, on June 30th 2005, with the largest *mela* held there ever since the Sido Kanhu Baisi organised events to remember the Hul collectively in the late 1960s. The 2005 event received excellent coverage in the radical newspaper *Prabhat Khabar*, which produced two supplements of articles that located the legacy of the Hul within the contemporary histories of Jharkhand and of South Asia. In the absence due to rain both of Arjun Munda, the BJP chief minister of Jharkhand, and Shibu Soren, his JMM rival, most media attention was drawn towards participants of a march organised by the Gota Bharot Sido Kanhu Hul Baisi (All-India Sido Kanhu Revolution Committee), that departed from Dumka (the district centre of the Santal Parganas) on 26th June and arrived at Bhognadih on 30th June. This unique rally brought Santals now living (as descendents of diasporic worker communties) in Nepal, Assam, Bangladesh, and West Bengal together with their Jharkhandi comrades, to forge a real sense of international and inter-regional solidarity amongst Santal Adivasis.

As part of its commitment to establish new understandings of Adivasi history and a heightened Indigenous media presence, ICITP in association with the University of Sussex has produced two documentary films on the Santal Hul. In discursive terms, these films are situated between the pro-Indigenous Human rights documentary genre (exemplified by the directors Meghnath, Sriprakash etc.), and the Jharkhandi Adivasi activist paradigm of self-determination. Co-directed by Daniel Rycroft and Joy Raj Tudu (National Coordinator of ICITP), *Hul Sengel: The Spirit of the Santal Revolution* documents how the movement's legacy informs the collective memory of Santals in the Santal Parganas, a district that was formed as a colonial response to the political dynamic of the Hul (and that has recently been dismantled by the BJP government in an effort to weaken the Adivasi consciousness). By incorporating rare interviews between ICITP coordinators and the descendents of Sido and Kanhu, the film emphasises the dialogic aspects of the Adivasi movement to represent agency/authority, voice/presence, and silence/absence in shifting and multiple locations. Bitiya Hembram a fifth-generation

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[5] http://www.sussex.ac.uk/development/*Santal*hul150

[6] http://www.sussex.ac.uk/development/*Adivasi*

descendent of Chunu Murmu reveals how her own mother-in-law was not able to tell her about the movement, because her grandmother-in-law was too afraid to discuss the past with her. Suggestive of the milieu of cultural violence that colonialist and nationalist governments sustained in the region some seventy or eighty years after the suppression of the movement, Bitiya Hembram's almost silent voicing of history gains support from other members of the family, notably Rup Chand Murmu, whose dynamic assertion of the legacy of the Hul in the context of present-day Jharkhandi identities signals an engagement with more politicised and collectivised epistemologies (such as those developed via the Sido Kanhu Baisi and the JMM, and now re-presented by ICITP *et al*).

The second documentary, provisionally entitled *Hul Johar: The Long March to Bhognadih*, aims to document and convey the views of those diasporic *Santals* who participated in the 150th anniversary celebrations, whilst also establishing dialogues with Jharkhandi protestors, such as the women of the *Rajmahal Bachao Andolan* (Save the Rajmahal Hills Movement), who also participated in the foot-march. The residents of nine villages near Amrapara, Pakur district (formerly of the Santal Parganas district), are leading a mass mobilisation against the State of Jharkhand, whose development agencies refused to consult the village representatives before attempting to acquire their lands for sale to the Punjab State Electricity Board for the purposes of mineral extraction. Their protests invoke the revolutionary legacy of Sido and Kanhu and reiterate the language of more recent anti-globalisation and anti-state movements such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Valley Movement). The film *Hul Johar* therefore aims to create an informative and inspiring narrative of memorialisation, collectivisation and resistance through which the multiple pasts and presents that constitute Adivasi consciousness can resonate. From the perspective of ICITP, both of these films attend to the need to record and create Adivasi epistemologies that reproduce and reinterpret the range of political positions taken up by Adivasis in colonial and postcolonial history.

Conclusion

Beyond the new global instruments of indigenous empowerment, the existing Constitution of the Republic of India contains important articles that support Indigenous and Tribal rights, yet that in practice are superseded by the everyday domination of petty officials, police and state-sponsored development projects. Despite the historical dynamic of indigenous resistance being written into the Constitution, in the form of special rights for Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes, the murkiness of the political waters of the newly devolved states often suppress the indigenous spirit that inspired the movements for regional autonomy. The administrative term 'Scheduled Tribe', which is now contested by Adivasi activists as inadequately conveying the notion of indigeneity, was issued in the pre-Independence phase to support the integrationist interests of a paternalistic state. Similarly the notion of a 'Scheduled Area', in which tribal land cannot be commodified, although responding to changes in colonial policy following the Santal Revolution of 1855–56, contains too much scope for state encroachment in the view of indigenous activists. As proved by the movement for Adivasi autonomy in Jharkhand ('forest-country', eastern India), statehood in itself means nothing unless the ethics of the government relate more closely to Adivasi interests.

Both the scheduling and the demands for statehood built upon notions of Adivasi distinctiveness vis-à-vis 'the mainstream community' (in nationalist parlance), and promoted ideas of conditional tribal autonomy, linguistic pluralism and alternative histories. Segregated as 'Aboriginals' in the colonial imaginary, the regional economies and collective identities that Adivasis sustained in the early modern period were increasingly unravelled by the forces of colonial capital and industrialisation. The nineteenth century witnessed numerous ongoing resistance movements led by Adivasi insurgents against the British colonial rulers and their regional accomplices. The brutal suppression of these movements fostered amongst the colonial elites a desire to control the areas then dominated by Adivasis via legal institutions that differed from the Regulation law practised in other agrarian districts. Although many Adivasis labourers were forced to emigrate to tea plantations in Northeast India and to the industrial centres in central India, the new status accorded to Tribal Customary Law in colonial governance provided Adivasis with institutional support in the early twentieth century as nationalist agitations increased. The notion of an alternative indigenous, i.e. 'Adivasi', identity gained currency amongst the new class of politicised Adivasis who perceived, in the indigenous lifestyles, qualities such as community solidarity that were deemed essential to the emerging national consciousness. More reactionary nationalists, however, perceived the newly assertive Adivasi community as nothing more than a product of the wider colonial project that spuriously divided India's population into non-Hindu and Hindu communities, and converted tribal peoples (who they perceived as 'backward Hindus') into Christians. With the rise of *Hindutva,* or right wing religious nationalism, the identity of Adivasis has been challenged further. Contesting the anti-indigenous notion of *Vanavasi* (forest dwellers), as well as many other cultural and political injustices, ICITP has incorporated elements of Adivasi history with the internationalist dimensions of the movement to generate a new discourse of indigeneity that will be tried and tested in many regions in the years and decades to come.

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Indigeneity, Anthropology and the Indian Tribes: A Critique

N. K. Das

Former Deputy Director of Anthropological Survey of India, Kolkata

Abstract

Indigeneity concept is central to discussions of political and legal rights of indigenous people. It is argued that there are enough evidences which demonstrate that India's tribespeople are 'the' indigenous people of India, who are forced to remain marginalized. Despite India's defiance in global forums, India's apex Supreme Court has recognized in a 2011 verdict 'scheduled tribes' as the 'indigenous people of India'. Recently, some scholars have viewed indigenous movements from the prism of 'Adivasi' movements. It is construed that neither the indigenous nor the Adivasi nomenclature is realistic enough to scaffold all India narrative. Adivasi populace has restricted peninsular presence. We find neither any single national 'Adivasi Movement'; nor any national indigenous political front. In anthropology too the ethics and the indigeneity definition discourses have created impasse and dilemma. Author recommends bringing 'strategic essentialism' of indigeneity within anthropological advocacy paradigm as a political tool for empowering the marginalized tribes.

The transnational concern over indigenous people and their rights has led to extensive debate surrounding 'indigeneity' in recent years. Even though many nation-states do not identify their native, aboriginal and tribespeople at par with 'indigenous people' as characterized in UN circle, especially in Asia; the tribespeople everywhere now employ 'indigeneity' variously to stress their cultural, political, and economic exploitation and historical injustices. Indigeneity has thus emerged as a leading political tactic in the counter-hegemonic resistance against exploitive regimes throughout the world. Keeping these perspectives in view, this critique explicates the chronological growth of the idea of indigenous people together with indigeneity on global stage, involvement of various international outfits supporting indigenous 'collective' rights, and the increasing engagement of the anthropologists in the indigenous movements, in various capacities. In Asian nation-states including India, we find strategic rejection of the notion of 'indigenous people', even though most Asian countries have sizeable sections of people who are legitimate indigenous people with diverse historical antecedents. Such groups have been sidelined in most countries and turned into subalterns, as in India. The fact that the tribes of India are India's undisputed indigenous people has been established in many new ethnographic-linguistic writings including genetic-genomic findings; and in recent years the Indian judiciary has proclaimed this fact forcefully in some vital judgments, even though they collide concurrently with state policy and skeptical historical narratives

of dominant communities [1] This article further seeks to explain these issues by highlighting the predicaments of Indian tribes in larger global scaffold as also in the aftermath of Indian state's purported proactive social protection initiatives, which seem to have only complicated the indigenous rights issues.

Indigenous People and Indigeneity: Global Declarations and Legal Reinterpretation

The recorded history of indigenous peoples in the UN is traceable since 1982 when the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples was established by a decision of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. It completed a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples in 1993. In the meantime, International Labor Organization came forward with a definition characterising indigeneity, especially through the Convention 169 on 'Indigenous and Tribal Peoples' (ILO 1989). The UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous Peoples was created in 2001 with a broad mandate to deal with six main areas: economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health, and human rights. It was followed by United Nations Declaration on the 'Rights of Indigenous Peoples' (General Assembly; 13 September 2007). The document emphasized the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions, and have the right to self-determination, so that they can freely determine their political status and pursue their development. They have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions, while retaining their rights to participate fully, if they choose to, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the state. The Declaration addresses both individual and collective rights, cultural rights and identity, rights to education, health, employment, language, and others. UN Declarations are generally not legally binding; however, they represent the dynamic development of international legal norms and reflect the commitment of states to move in certain directions, abiding by certain principles. The Declaration indeed establishes an important standard for the treatment of indigenous peoples and support them in combating discrimination and marginalization (http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/declaration.html).

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has decided not to adopt any formal definition and to present self-identification as the ultimate criterion. Indigenous people are therefore, ultimately, those who claim to be indigenous–a solution that is as satisfactory as one could imagine within the current nation-state–dominated international 'constitution'. Second, it is problematic to have the recognition of indigenous people controlled by an international body.

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[1] Tribespeople of India are referred as *vanvasi* (forest dwellers) by the *Sangh Parivar*, which is ideologically committed to *Hindutva*. The Sangh Parivar's effort to recast Adivasis as vanvasis is a critical component of the ideological project of *Hindu Rashtra*. The reason why the Sangh denies Adivasis the status of the original dwellers is that it runs counter to its own claim that the Aryans, who brought Vedic civilization to the country, are the original inhabitants of the land (Philip, A.J., 'Hindutva, the lexical way: Delegitimizing the Adivasi', © *Indian Express,* 1999; 'Adivasi vs Vanvasi: The Hinduization of Tribals in India', *Outlook* Magazine, November 20, 2002; http://www.outlookindia.com/article/Adivasi-vs-Vanvasi-The-Hinduization-of-Tribals-in-India/217974).

The term 'indigenous' has also become part of legal discourse, since global agencies regard 'indigenous peoples' rights' as part of 'international customary law', visualized through international legal instruments. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the two International Covenants of 1966 (one on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the other on Civil and Political Rights) list the rights of individuals vis-à-vis states. Current debates within this conceptual framework concern the legitimacy of religious or other cultural norms as sources of individual rights and legal claims. Current debates within this framework concerns the sort of 'external protections' (self-governance, specific economic rights, language protection) necessary to ensure real equality, and the extent to which one ought to permit social norms that would not be permitted in the wider society–for example, those which discriminate against women–to be enforced within a minority group (Bowen 2000). Convention No. 169 is an international legal instrument that broadly sets forth binding provisions for the protection of indigenous peoples' rights, inspired by respect for their cultures, ways of life and traditional forms of organization. It also establishes specific mechanisms by which states are to carry out their obligations in this regard. Convention No. 169 also recognizes the right of indigenous peoples to use their own customs and customary law to deal with their affairs and resolve their conflicts. Right to land and territory is ensured in the Convention No. 169. Widely accepted working definitions of the term 'indigenous people' within the international discourse thus emphasize four criteria, namely first-comer, non-dominance, cultural difference and self-ascription (Saugestad 2001: 43). These definitions reveal 'indigeneity' to be a variant of collectivized-autochthonous ethnicity that has been marginalized by dominating later-comers, who are running, the state, in which the indigenous discrimination take place. It was expected that potent resistance to the international indigenous project will come from strong nations. Thus, in 2007, the only four voting countries to reject the international indigenist 'Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples', were Australia, the United States, Canada, and New Zealand. Previously they had opposed it over 30 years. Although the staunch resistance to the international indigenous mission came from these countries; fact remains that the very international perceptions of what 'indigeneity' is and who 'indigenous peoples' may be came from these countries (Merlan 2009). Unsurprisingly, the themes of 'first occupants of a country', and 'landownership', issues of 'autonomy' and 'self-determination', inextricably linked with indigeneity, were seen as admonition.

The rights of indigenous peoples are considered 'collective' rights, which belong to them as peoples and collective subjects, as well as 'original' rights, since they hold 'historical' rights predating the nation-states.[2] This recognition is based on what some authors have called a 'legal order of diversity' (UNESCO-INI 1991-59) in which nation-states recognize their multiethnic and multicultural character. Unfortunately, however, in most of the countries with indigenous populations, the relationship has been marked by confrontation—a confrontation between the indigenous organizations that seek respect for cultural diversity and territorial rights, and the repressive governments. Governments

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[2] James Anaya has discussed all the latest treaties in the international law of indigenous peoples which promise their collective rights (Anaya, S. 2004).

seek integration of indigenous populations into the schemes of the dominant unitary culture, and the nation's social, political, and economic models are injected into indigenous peoples' traditional territories by state projects. There are more than 370 million self-identified indigenous peoples in some 70 countries around the world (http://www.ifad.org/english-indigenous).

The word 'indigeneity', like its near- synonym 'aboriginality', forms an abstract noun from 'indigenous people'. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'aboriginality' as 'the quality of being aboriginal; existence in or possession of a land at the earliest stage of its history'. In a similar way, 'indigeneity' is derived from 'indigenous', which means 'born or produced naturally in a land or region; native or belonging naturally to (the soil, region, etcetera)' from *indu*, an old Latin root meaning 'within' (Waldron 2003). Jeremy Waldron (2003) argues that if aboriginality is the 'quality of being aboriginal', then indigeneity can be defined as 'the quality of being indigenous', which itself describes the quality of being born or produced naturally in a land or region. In 1991, the World Bank defined Indigenous Peoples being those identified in particular geographical areas by the presence in varying degrees of the characteristics such as close attachment to ancestral territories and to the natural resources in these areas; self-identification and identification by others as members of a distinct cultural group; an indigenous language, often different from the national language; presence of customary social and political institutions; and primarily subsistence-oriented production (McGuinne 2014 web). Autochthonous is another term often used within United Nations circles, as synonymous with indigenous. Indigeneity and autochthony have in common a reference to a supposed primo-occupancy and cultural specificity as a basis for specific rights, maintaining cultural specificity, leading in many cases to demand for self-determination.

Indigeneity, Indigenous Advocacy and Anthropological Dilemma

History of anthropological indigenous advocacy is traceable to the incident of 'Amazon genocide' on indigenous people, which had alarmed several anthropologists, who came forward to establish the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) in 1968, which is now a foremost platform for advocacy anthropology. Today indigenous peoples from all over the world are involved in IWGIA's global network (www.iwgia.org). In recent decades much of anthropology's interest in local, native, autochthonous peoples has been framed in terms of indigeneity, whereby local movements revolving around race, ethnicity, or religion, have come to be seen as indigenous rights movements. Niezen (2003) attributes the origins of international 'indigenism' to the intersecting development of identity politics and universal human rights laws and principles. Other analyses focus on the delocalizing impact of modernity (Appadurai 1996, Giddens 1984). In the meantime several reputed anthropological journals such as *Current Anthropology*, *Anthropology Today* and *Social Anthropology* have brought out special issues on theme of indigeneity, reflecting emerging concerns. Adam Kuper (2003), initiated a debate with his article 'The Return of the Native', published in *Current Anthropology*, in which he presented the term 'indigenous' as a sheer remnant of the nineteenth century evolutionism, a more politically correct equivalent of the terms 'primitive' and 'native'. He proposed that the term should be abandoned, provoking passionate protest from many other anthropologists, who often

employ indigeneity to advocate the rights of several dispossessed groups (Kenrick and Lewis 2004). Alan Barnard stressed on the term's validity, as a relational, legal concept – 'a useful tool for political persuasion' – and a concept that is contingent historically and situationally, and not capable of being captured within one nomothetic definition (Barnard 2006).

There was an extended debate countering Kuper's perspective and, more generally, the whole question of indigeneity in *Anthropology Today* (2002–2004). Trond Thuen and Barnard strongly argued that Kuper's accusations are misplaced and pointed out the need for anthropologists to focus instead on the shifting relationships between indigenous peoples and the governments and majorities in their countries. Evie Plaice argues that any attempt to separate legal from anthropological understandings of the term 'indigenous' is impractical. Many scholars have indeed argued that indigenous identity itself was a product of historic political processes. Drawing on the work of cultural theoretician Stuart Hall (1996), Clifford (2001) and Li (2000) suggested that one way to elide this debate over authenticity is to focus on the articulation of indigeneity. These developments have made 'indigeneity' a central issue for contemporary social anthropology, whereby anthropology requires continued engagement in a politics of critical solidarity with indigenous peoples. Writing in *Current Anthropology*, Andre Beteille (1998) critiqued the emotionalism of certain anthropologists whose 'state of moral excitation' is to blame for the idea of 'indigenous people'. In response to Andre Beteille's discomfort about the 'idea of indigenous people' (1998), John Brown Childs and Guillermo Delgado-P. (1998) countered that the development of the concept of indigenous people is not the result of any anthropological impetus; rather this concept has been forged by numerous communities of indigenous peoples themselves around the world. Indeed, anthropologists have constantly accompanied the UN's Working Group on Indigenous Peoples and other organizations and have contributed to make indigenous voices heard. Fact remains that the concern for indigenous people does open up 'ground upon which mutually respectful interactions of indigenous peoples and anthropologists can develop' (Varese 1996). Another commentator, Elizabeth Pesta (1998) argued that with regard to contemporary social problems, the designation 'indigenous' is often the basis from which legal and constitutional rights are defined, and from which social problems are addressed (http://www.publicanthropology.org/archives/current-anthropology-1998).

Kottak (1999) argues that anthropologists' personal witnessing of threats to their subjects imposes a moral responsibility, and Hodgson (2002) points out that the uneven topography of power in the world makes neutral representation by anthropologists Impossible. Scholars such as Li (2000) have looked at the way agency is exercised in the articulation of indigeneity, which she says opens up room to maneuver that might otherwise be unavailable, even if some of the elements employed in this articulation are essentialized. Li (2000: 163) writes, 'the telling of this story [of indigeneity] in relation to Lindu or any other place in Indonesia has to be regarded as an accomplishment, a contingent outcome of the cultural and political work of articulation through which indigenous knowledge and identity were made explicit, alliances formed, and media attention appropriately focused'. Anthropologists have also highlighted the value of

indigenous environmental knowledge and conservation in the larger discourse of indigeneity, especially indigenous movements. Such anthropological association with indigenous rights movements and violence are welcome even though they 'challenge anthropological theory as well as ethics', as argued by Dove, who also suggests the importance of analyzing the contradictions inherent in the co-evolution of science, society, and environment (Dove 2006).

South/South-East Asian Linkage and India's Indigenous People

There have been both rejection and strategic acceptance of the concept of indigeneity within Asian nation-states. Nepal has endorsed the global nomenclature of 'indigenous people' to classify a section of its people; though China, India, Myanmar, Indonesia, and others reject it (Li 2000; Tsing 2007; Merlan, 2009). There are an estimated 260 million indigenous peoples in Asia, making it the most culturally diverse region in the world. Asian indigenous peoples face problems, such as loss of control over land and natural resources, discrimination and marginalization, heavy assimilation pressure and, violent repression by state security forces. There are numerous indigenous insurgent groups seeking political self-determination and cessation. Several countries have legislations that protect the rights of indigenous peoples; nevertheless, these rights are systematically diluted, often ignored or overruled. In India, it is widely held that 'the peoples, whom the anthropologists call tribes, happen to be the indigenous, autochthonous people of India' (Ray 1972; Thapar 1966). Anthropologists, historians and linguists (Pattanayak 1998; Risley 1915) generally accept that the Austro-Asiatic speaking tribes seem to be the original inhabitants of India. The Indian tribes speak over 700 languages belonging to language families of Austro-Asiatic, Dravidian and Tibeto-Burman. We witness a strong South Asia-South-East Asian linkage in linguistic and cultural spheres. The proto-Australoid tribes, who speak dialects belonging to the Austric linguistic group, are believed to be the basic element in the Indian population (Thapar 1966). Some other scholars (Buxton 1925; Sarkar 1958) have, however, proposed that the Dravidians are the original inhabitants. New genetic and genomic studies reveal the early ancestry of numerous Indian tribes, including tribes of the Andaman Islands. India has served as a major corridor for the dispersal of 'modern humans' out of Africa (Cann 2001).

The Indian subcontinent has been populated by a series of migrations propelled by significant technological innovations outside India since the first major expansion of non-African Homo sapiens, probably around 65,000 years before present. The likely major migrations include i) Austric language speakers soon after 65,000 ybp (years before present), probably from northeast ii) Dravidian speakers around 6,000 ybp from mideast with the knowledge of cultivation of crops like wheat and domestication of animals like cattle, sheep, goats iii) Indo-European speakers in several waves after 4000 ybp with control over horses and iron technology iv) Sino-Tibetan speakers in several waves after 6000 ybp with knowledge of rice cultivation. A notable feature of Indian society is the persistence of thousands of tribe-like endogamous groups in a complex agrarian and now industrial society. In this society populations of dominant groups have continued to grow, while those of subjugated groups may have stagnated most of the time (Gadgil et al. 1997). The archaeological evidences, based on stone tools from the Garo hills of Meghalaya, Northeast India, suggest that this region might have been inhabited as early

as in the Paleolithic period (Reddy et al. 2007). Northeast India is actually the crucial bridge between the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia and an important corridor for the initial peopling of East Asia. Indeed, Austro-Asiatic linguistic family dialects spoken by certain tribes in India, including Northeast India and entire Southeast Asia, they provide the signatures of genetic link between Indian and Southeast Asian populations. The genetic-genomic researches suggest that Austro-Asiatic Khasi from Northeast India represent a genetic continuity between the populations of South and Southeast Asia, thereby advocating that northeast India could have been a major corridor for the movement of populations from India to East/Southeast Asia (Das 2015).

Popular belief and some evidences point to the fact that many tribes were pushed into the hills after the invasions of the Indo-Aryan populations some 4,000 years ago. Myths and folklore of many tribes suggest that they had occupied much larger part of the subcontinent and they had independent existence until their territories were swamped by the dominant agricultural communities, earlier through normal incursions and later under the patronage of the British, who introduced several oppressive laws and regulations, and imposed taxes. As a result, there were numerous tribal revolts from the mid-nineteenth century onwards in several parts of eastern India. Nihar Ranjan Ray observed that the indigenous people had long settled in different parts of the country before the Aryan-speaking people penetrated India to settle down first, in the Kabul and Indus valleys and then within a millennium and a half, to spread out in slow stages, over large parts of the country and push their way of life and civilization over practically the entire area of the country along the plains and river valleys (Ray 1972).

Most of Indian tribes live in rural areas; many occupy remote hills and also the islands. In most places they profess old 'primitive economy'. Indeed, more than ten per cent tribes pursue shifting cultivation and hunting-gathering. The government of India refers to the tribes of India as 'Scheduled Tribes'. These tribes since 1950 have been enlisted so based on a 'notification' by the President under Article 342 of the Constitution of India. The characteristics considered for official 'notification' are 'primitive traits', 'distinctive culture', 'shyness with the public at large', 'geographical isolation', and 'backwardness'. Seventy-five 'most primitive' tribes, are now called in official jargon as 'particularly vulnerable tribal groups', following the recommendation of historically innovative Forest Rights Act, 2016. The tribes of India inhabit most parts of the country (except Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Chandigarh and Puducherry (Pondicherry). It is in parts of eastern, central and western India, where tribespeople are recognized as Adivasis. In view of their habitation in hills areas they are called as girijan and vanvasi/vanyajati or 'forest dwellers' (Srivastava 2010). However the foremost concentration of tribes is found in the north-eastern states (Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh). Most of these are tribal dominant states. The Anthropological Survey of India identified and located 635 distinct tribes in India. People of India project (1985-1995) identified 461 main tribes and 172 segments/minor tribes. Some territorial segments were also included. Hence, People of India project reported about 635 tribes (Singh 1994). This taxonomy was not based on census enumeration and administrative identification as 'scheduled tribe'.

Indigenous Rights, Multiple State Initiatives and Disastrous Implementation

Indian state policy towards Indian tribes has been proactive since Indian independence and thus a mix of constitutional and budgetary instruments, followed by welfare and social protection initiatives have been in place. Nevertheless, the tribal areas suffer from scarcity, and the tribes, in general, have no access to basic health services and their number is declining due to poverty, malnutrition, ignorance on health care, and illiteracy. They have low literacy, high mortality, and poor hygiene. They are mostly unemployed that they migrate to urban centers in search of work. The poverty headcount index for the tribes fell by 31 percent between 1983 and 2004–05 (Das and Mehta). It is incorrect to claim that the tribes of north-east, since they have gained from education, have any better economic status, compared to tribes living as marginalized groups in most parts of central, eastern and western states. The Constitution of India provides an array of affirmative action programmes for the tribes. There are numerous laws and special regulations for protection of indigenous rights and tribal customary laws. Most of the safeguards are enshrined within the Articles 15, 16, 17 and 23 of Indian Constitution. There are numerous special programmes for India's 'most primitive indigenous people', now termed as 'particularly vulnerable tribal groups'. The Sentinelese tribespeople of the North Sentinel Island of the Andaman Islands (India) will probably qualify for being the world's most 'isolated' and virgin 'indigenous people'.

Recognizing the symbiotic relationship between tribes and forests, the National Forest Policy, 1988 had made provisions to safeguard the customary rights over forest lands of tribes. In order to implement these provisions, the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) issued instructions to states in 1990, highlighting the specific rights over numerous subjects such as: a) forest habitation for self- cultivation for livelihood, b) community rights such as *nistar*[3], c) right to own, use or dispose of minor forest produce, d) conversion of forest village to revenue village, e) conversion of *pattas* or leases issued by any local authority or any state government on forest land to titles, and f) other traditional customary rights. However, excluded from customary rights were hunting, trapping or extracting body parts of any wild animal. Tribes could not indulge in any activity that adversely affects wild animals, forests and the biodiversity in the local area. The legal condition required that such communities had occupied forest land before October 25, 1980 [The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 came into force on this date]. The Bill prescribed 2.5 hectares as the upper limit of forest land that tribal nuclear family

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[3] Nistar refers to land or forest area set apart as community land. Villagers have usufruct (nistar) rights over them to get necessities, which include timber and fuelwood, burial/cremation grounds, MFPs (minor forest produces), *gaothan* (cattle-shed), pasture/ fodder, and public uses such as schools, playgrounds, places of worship etc. The *nistar-patrak* details the terms and conditions for the use of nistar land. Under British regime there was systematic attempt to abolish the Nistar rights and bring all estate under British rule, the system continued due to a unique set of circumstances. In central India *Zamindars* were tribals themselves and hence continued the system of Nistar rights. The only difference was that in exchange of these rights people were forced to work as bonded labourers (*begar*) for the Zamindar. Nistar thus means the concessions granted for removal from forest coupes on payment at stipulated rates, specified forest produce for bona-fide domestic use, but not for barter or sale. The nistar rates were fixed earlier by the Forest Department for the special forest produce in consultation with the District Collector. Under FRA, 2006, such powers are reallocated to Village Councils.

may be allotted. However, the Bill did not specify the kind of evidence that a tribal would require to prove their occupancy of forest land before 1980 (Dreze 2005). The term 'community forest resource' was also not defined, and hence, it was not clear whether these included resources within government owned forests including National Parks and Sanctuaries. Despite assurance towards genuine protection of indigenous rights and tribal customary laws, as ensured in above regulation, the tribespeople could not establish their occupancy antecedence in most cases and as such the policy proved to be disastrous.

Tribes in postcolonial era were systematically deprived and dispossessed of fundamental rights and territories, despite proclamation of intermittent tribal policies, which included the establishment of tribal development blocks to address the specific needs of tribes. It was, only in 1996, with the passing of the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), that India's indigenous people were given substantive powers to regain their fundamental rights and territories. Thus, tribal gram sabhas were empowered to preserve their customary practices, their community resources, their modes of dispute resolution, and importantly the right to approve government plans, programmes and projects within their jurisdiction (Mukul 1997: 929). The gram sabhas were allowed to decide about minor forest produce collection as well as to recommend granting of mining concessions. Sadly, PESA was not taken seriously in many states to sincerely implement the provisions. At the same time, the interference of 'forest officials' had created major hurdles.

Jharkhand has had a long tradition of customary institutions of local governance, the legitimacy of which was recognized by various enactments in the pre-independence era, such as the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act 1908, Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act 1949, among others. The introduction of the PESA was an attempt to extend modern democratic institutions of local governance amongst the Adivasi population in scheduled areas, while not totally replacing the traditional institutions. This had created a sharp divide between the votaries of traditional systems premised on customary Adivasi headmen and the statutory panchayats elected democratically – a divide noticed during the field study. This state of affairs was observed by author during short visits to tribal districts of Jharkhand and Odisha a few years ago.

Forest Rights Act, 2006 and Other Laws: Predicaments of Execution

The passage of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 (Forest Rights Act or FRA) is regarded as a watershed event in the prolonged struggle of the Indian tribes. For the first time in the history of India, the state recognized that indigenous rights had been denied to tribespeople for long, and hence FRA, 2006, was brought in to compensate the 'historic injustice' done to tribes of India. The FRA addresses the right to live in forestland for habitation or cultivation, right of access, use and sale of minor forest produce, and right to protect, regenerate, conserve or manage any community forest resource, amongst other rights (these rights can be claimed both as individuals and as a community). It provides tribal and other forest dwelling communities the assertion of tenure rights and addresses important livelihood security issues, while also stressing the rights and responsibilities of

forest dwellers in maintaining sustainable forest use patterns and the conservation of forest biodiversity.

There are two main features of FRA which address exactly the demands made internationally on behalf of all 'indigenous peoples', and which have immense positive potential in Indian context. First is the package of rights that includes the claim of the community over tenure, occupancy and management of forests. Second, the decentralized self-governance model that it mandates. The new law thus authorizes the lowest tier of local self-governance–the Gram Sabha–as the decision-making body in governance. The FRA thus provides protection to customary laws, and thereby the right of ownership, access to collect, use or dispose of minor forest produce; entitlements to fish and other products of water bodies, grazing (both settled and trans-human) and traditional seasonal resource access of nomadic or pastoralist communities; community tenure of habitat and habitation for primitive tribal groups and pre-agricultural communities; right of access to biodiversity and community right to intellectual property and traditional knowledge related to biodiversity and cultural diversity (excluding any traditional right of hunting or trapping or extracting any part of the body of any species of wild animal). The Gram Sabhas have been made vigilant to–'protect the wildlife, forest and biodiversity; ensure that adjoining water catchment area, water sources and other ecological sensitive areas are adequately protected; ensure that the habitat of the forest dwelling scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers is preserved from any form of destructive practices affecting their cultural and natural heritage; ensure that the decisions taken in Gram Sabha to regulate access to community forest resources and stop any activity which adversely affects the wild animals, forest and the biodiversity are complied with' (www.kalpavriksha). According to a statement of Kalpavriksh, overall, the FRA both in spirit and in letter reflects a significant paradigm shift in the way forest governance has been officially viewed in the country (www.kalpavriksha).

Although the FRA came into force on 1 January 2009, lack of proper implementation has deprived tens of thousands of tribes of their rights to forest land. According to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, as of 30 September 2011, a total of 3,149,269 claims had been received, of which only 2,808,494 cases could be dealt with (www.aitpn.org/IRQ/Vol-III/2-3/ April - September, 2008). Then, there was problem of poor response in many states.

FRA, 2006 became applicable in the Northeastern states only theoretically. It is true that this act is inapplicable in Nagaland and Mizoram on account of Article 371 A & G, but other areas fall under it. In most instances, the official forests have been notified without proper settlement of rights required by law and therefore many tribespeople and traditional communities are unable to claim rights in them. In Tripura the Tripura Land Reforms and Revenue Act of 1960 recognizes only individual land. That is against the common property managed according to the tribal customary law. Thus, Tripura tribes lost more than 72,000 acres of their land. Lands were lost to migrants and government projects (Fernandes and Bharali 2010: 77). The tribal insurgency in Tripura is linked to loss of some 40 percent of their land (Bhaumik 2003: 84-9). Tribes of Tripura could hardly be rescued by the FRA, 2006.

In the meantime the central ministry of tribal affairs has notified the amended rules under FRA, 2006. The new rules, notified on September 6, 2012 further empower the committee constituted under the Gram Sabha to prepare conservation and management

plan for community forest resources after forest dwellers' rights on such resources are recognised. The Gram Sabha will approve all decisions of the committee pertaining to issue of transit permits, use of income from sale of forest produce or modification of management plans, say the rules. Besides, no committee or individual official at the panchayat, block or forest range level except the forest rights committee shall be eligible to receive, decide or reject the forest rights claims. (www.downtoearth.org).

Consequent upon implementation of FRA, 2006, Maharashtra government has further notified the Maharashtra Village Forest Rules, 2014, which can be seen as further amendment to FRA, 2006. Dilip Gode and eight others in their letter to editor, *The Telegraph*, informed that:

> The FRA, 2006, is a historical initiative to empower tribes by giving them the ownership of forest resources, but the community rights vested in this piece of legislation does not cover the entire ambit. To address this anomaly, Maharashtra has notified Maharashtra Village Forest Rules, 2014. As per the provisions under Clause 10(G) of MVFR, absolute rights over trees, timber and firewood are given to the gram sabha. This clause allows the local community to harvest timber for their use and livelihood. Central government should, therefore, give the right to harvest timber species to the communities by making necessary changes to the forest rights act. The rights-holders are equally responsible for the management of forest areas. Hence they should be given equal rights over timber. The forest department should provide technical help to harvest timber to the gram sabha if the latter so requests. If any proceed is obtained from the sale of timber by the forest department, the same should be deposited in the account of the gram sabha within that financial year (Gode 2014).

Both PESA and the FRA fundamentally confronted the old power relations, especially the conventional state-industry nexus, and tried to shift greater power to the tribespeople. Regrettably, there continued the interference of 'forest officials', which retarded the pace of implementation. At district and state levels the larger bureaucratic hurdles further hampered the process of verification and decision making. It can only be presumed that the bold initiative undertaken in the shape of the Maharashtra Village Forest Rules, 2014 becomes an eternal solution and worthy of emulation in other states of the union to ameliorate the indigenous predicaments.

Adivasis' Right to Self-Governance and the Indian Judiciary

The Indian judiciary has been at the forefront in protecting the rights of the marginalized sections of Indian society. The Indian judiciary is known for its proactive role in the political system. The new activism of the Indian judiciary has generated a belief in the public mind that the judiciary could be relied upon to ensure the rights of the citizens, and it is an alternative resort when the legislature and executive mechanisms fail. Thus, in an earlier judgment, known as the *Samatha* or *Samata Judgment*[4] enshrined

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[4] In the early nineties, Samatha, an advocacy and social action group working or the rights of tribal communities and for the protection of the environment in Andhra Pradesh, was involved in an apparently local dispute over leasing of tribal lands to the private mining industries. The tribal community wanted to regain control over their lands rather than work as labor force in the mining operations on their own lands. After losing the initial battle in the lower and High Court, Samatha filed a Special Leave Petition in the Supreme Court of India. The four year legal battle led to a historic judgment in July 1997 by a three-judge

in the Constitution (Fifth Schedule). Samata filed a Special Leave Petition at the Supreme Court. After a four-year legal battle, it won a historic judgment in 1997 which declared null and void the transfer of land in the Scheduled Areas for private mining, and upheld the Forest Protection Act of 1980 that prohibits mining in Scheduled Areas. The Supreme Court ruled that the state should adhere to the laws and principles governing the tribal areas. It also recognized the (73rd) Amendment to the Constitution and the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996 that recognized the competence of Gram Sabhas to safeguard community resources and reiterated the Adivasis' right to self-governance.

India's Supreme Court Validates 'Indigeneity' of Tribes of India

The Indian government has not accepted the nomenclature indigenous people to classify the tribes of India. Despite India's defiance in global forums, India's apex

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Supreme Court bench. It was a land-mark judgment in favor tribal rights. It permitted the mining activity to go on as long as it is undertaken by the government, or instrumentality of state or a cooperative society of the tribals. The instrumentality of the state has been defined by the Court as organizations which are completely owned by the government or where the government or its agencies are the majority shareholders.

As per the verdict all lands leased by the government or its agencies to private mining companies are null and void. It however upheld that transfer of land to the government or its instrumentalities is entrustment of public property because the aim of public corporations is in public interest. The salient features of this judgment are:

1. As per the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992, '…every Gram Sabha shall be competent to safeguard…..Under clause (m) (ii) the power to prevent alienation of land in the Scheduled Areas and to take appropriate action to restore any unlawful alienation of land of a scheduled tribe'.
2. Minerals to be exploited by tribals themselves either individually or through cooperative societies with financial assistance of the State
3. In the absence of total prohibition, the court laid down certain duties and obligations to the lessee, as part of the project expenditure: at least 20% of net profits as permanent fund for development needs apart from reforestation and maintenance of ecology.
4. Transfer of land in Scheduled Areas by way of lease to non tribals, corporation aggregate, etc stands prohibited to prevent their exploitation in any form.
5. Transfer of mining lease to non tribals, company, corporation aggregate or partnership firm, etc is unconstitutional, void and inoperative. State instrumentalities like APMDC stand excluded from prohibition.
6. Renewal of lease is fresh grant of lease and therefore, any such renewal stands prohibited.
7. In States where there are no acts which provide for total prohibition of mining leases of land in Scheduled Areas, Committee of Secretaries and State Cabinet Sub Committees should be constituted and decision taken thereafter.
8. Conference of all Chief Ministers, Ministers holding the Ministry concerned and Prime Minister, and Central Ministers concerned should take a policy decision for a consistent scheme throughout the country in respect of tribal lands.

Strong Opposition to the Judgment

Needless to say, vested interests of powerful corporate houses and the political class joined hands to negate the Apex Court's verdict. Like PESA, the Samatha Judgment also became a hurdle in their "development" plans. In March 2000 the Supreme Court dismissed the petitions of State & Central governments for modification of the Samatha order. (https://socialissuesindia.wordpress.com/2012/09/06/the-samatha-judgment-and-the-fifth-schedule-of-the-constitution/).

Supreme Court has issued a pertinent verdict in 2011 in case of a woman of Bhil scheduled tribe, resolving to some extent the very controversy pertaining to indigeneity and especially the suitability of category of 'indigenous people'. The Supreme Court in its latest judgment on 5 January 2011 unequivocally asserted that Scheduled Tribes are 'indigenous people of India'. On 5 January 2011, it dismissed a criminal appeal, concluding its judgment with a call to address historical wrongs done to the nation's tribal peoples: 'It is time now', the Court noted, 'to undo the historical injustice' done to these people.[5]

This judgment of 5 January 2011 pertains to a woman victim, among others, who belong to the constitutionally recognized Bhil tribe. In 1994, three men and one woman—all 'powerful persons' in her village—stripped, beat, and kicked the pregnant Nandabai in her house. The four accused were convicted by the Additional Sessions Judge, Ahmednagar on 05.02.1998. However, the Aurangabad Bench of Bombay High Court acquitted the accused of the offence under Section 3 of the SC/ST Act, but the conviction under the provisions of the IPC was confirmed. However, that part of the order regarding fine was set aside and each of the appellant was directed to pay a fine of Rs. 5000/- only to the victim Nandabai (http://www.achrweb.org/).

The Supreme Court expressed surprise 'that the conviction of the accused under the Scheduled Cases and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 was set aside on hyper technical ground that the Caste Certificate was not produced and investigation by a Police Officer of the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police was not done'. The apex Court stated that 'the sentence was too light considering the gravity of the offence'. The Court went to state that 'The parade of a tribal woman on the village road in broad day light is shameful, shocking and outrageous. The dishonor of the victim Nandabai called for harsher punishment, and we are surprised that the State Government did not

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[5] On 5 January 2011, the Supreme Court of India dismissed a criminal appeal, concluding its judgment with a call to address historical wrongs done to the nation's tribal peoples. This judgment pertains to dismissal of the Criminal Appellate Jurisdiction arising out of Special Leave Petition (Crl) No. 10367 of 2010) (Kailas & Others … Appellant (s) -versus- State of Maharashtra. The court dismissed the petition which sought acquittal of the accused who were convicted for atrocities against a young woman, Nandabai, 25 years old belonging to the Bhil tribe, which is a Scheduled Tribe (ST) in Maharashtra. She was beaten with fists and kicks and stripped naked by the accused persons after tearing her blouse and brassieres and then got paraded in naked condition on the road of a village while being beaten and abused by the accused. The four accused were convicted by the Additional Sessions Judge, Ahmednagar on 05.02.1998 under Sections 452, 354, 323, 506 (2) read with Section 34 Indian Penal Code (IPC) and sentenced to suffer rigorous imprisonments for six months and to pay a fine of Rs. 100/-. They were also sentenced to suffer RI for one year and to pay a fine of Rs. 100/- for the offence punishable under Sections 354/34 IPC. They were also sentenced under Section 323/34 IPC and sentenced to three months RI and to pay a fine of Rs. 100/-. The appellants were further convicted under Section 3 of the Scheduled Cases and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 and sentenced to suffer RI for one year and to pay a fine of Rs. 100/-. However, the Aurangabad Bench of Bombay High Court acquitted the accused of the offence under Section 3 of the SC/ST Act, but the conviction under the provisions of the IPC was confirmed. However, that part of the order regarding fine was set aside and each of the appellant was directed to pay a fine of Rs. 5000/- only to the victim Nandabai. (*India Human Rights Report*, Issue-2, October to December 2010, http://www.achrweb.org/ihrrq/issue2/indigenous.html).

file any appeal for enhancement of the punishment awarded by the Additional Sessions Judge'.

At the outset the Supreme Court observed that:

This appeal furnishes a typical instance of how many of our people in India have been treating the tribal people (Scheduled Tribes or Adivasis), who are probably the descendants of the original inhabitants of India, but now constitute only about 8% of our total population, and as a group are one of the most marginalized and vulnerable communities in India characterized by high level of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, disease, and landlessness.

The apex Court thereon explained the history and plight of the Bhils in particular and indigenous peoples of India in general:

The Bhils are probably the descendants of some of the original inhabitants of India living in various parts of the country particularly southern Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh etcetera. They are mostly tribal people and have managed to preserve many of their tribal customs despite many oppressions and atrocities from other communities. According to 'World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples–India', in Maharashtra Bhils were mercilessly persecuted in the 17th century. If a criminal was caught and found to be a Bhil, he or she was often killed on the spot. Historical accounts tell us of entire Bhil communities being killed and wiped out. Hence, Bhils retreated to the strongholds of the hills and forests. Thus Bhils are probably the descendants of some of the original inhabitants of India known as the 'aborigines' or Scheduled Tribes (Adivasis), who presently comprise of only about 8% of the population of India. The rest 92% of the population of India consists of descendants of immigrants. Thus, India is broadly a country of immigrants like North America. While North America (USA and Canada) is a country of new immigrants, who came mainly from Europe over the last four or five centuries, India is a country of old immigrants in which people have been coming in over the last ten thousand years or so. Probably about 92% people living in India today are descendants of immigrants, who came mainly from the North-West, and to a lesser extent from the North-East.

Since this is a point of great importance for the understanding of our country, it is necessary to go into it in some detail. People migrate from uncomfortable areas to comfortable areas. This is natural because everyone wants to live in comfort. Before the coming of modern industry there were agricultural societies everywhere, and India was a paradise for these because agriculture requires level land, fertile soil, plenty of water for irrigation etc. which was in abundance in India. Why should anybody living in India migrate to, say, Afghanistan which has a harsh terrain, rocky and mountainous and covered with snow for several months in a year when one cannot grow any crop? Hence, almost all immigrations and invasions came from outside into India (except those Indians who were sent out during British rule as indentured labour, and the recent migration of a few million Indians to the developed countries for job opportunities). There is perhaps not a single instance of an invasion from India to outside India. India was a veritable paradise for pastoral and agricultural societies because it has level and fertile land, hundreds of rivers, forests etc. and is rich in natural resources. Hence for thousands of years people kept pouring into India because they found a comfortable life here in a country which was gifted by nature. As the great Urdu poet Firaq Gorakhpuri wrote: *Sar Zamin-e-hind par aqwaam-e-alam ke firaq/ Kafile guzarte gae Hindustan banta gaya* (In the land of Hind, the caravans of the peoples of the world kept coming in and India kept getting formed).

Who were the original inhabitants of India? At one time it was believed that the Dravidians were the original inhabitants. However, this view has been considerably modified

subsequently, and now the generally accepted belief is that the original inhabitants of India were the pre- Dravidian aborigines i.e. the ancestors of the present tribes or advasis (Scheduled Tribes). In this connection it is stated in The Cambridge History of India (Vol. I), Ancient India as follows:

It must be remembered, however, that, when the term 'Dravidian' is thus used ethnographically, it is nothing more than a convenient label. It must not be assumed that the speakers of the Dravidian languages are aborigines. In Southern India, as in the North, the same general distinction exists between the more primitive tribes of the hills and jungles and the civilized inhabitants of the fertile tracts; and some ethnologists hold that the difference is racial and not merely the result of culture. Mr. Thurston, for instance, says:

It is the Pre-Dravidian aborigines, and not the later and more cultured Dravidians, who must be regarded as the primitive existing race…These Pre-Dravidians…are differentiated from the Dravidian classes by their short stature and broad (platyrhine) noses. There is strong ground for the belief that the Pre-Dravidians are ethnically related to the Veddas of Ceylon, the Talas of the Celebes, the Batin of Sumatra, and possibly the Australians (The Madras Presidency, pp. 124-5).

It would seem probable, then, that the original speakers of the Dravidian languages were outsiders, and that the ethnographical Dravidians are a mixed race. In the more habitable regions the two elements have fused, while representatives of the aborigines are still in the fastnesses (in hills and forests) to which they retired before the encroachments of the newcomers. If this view be correct, we must suppose that these aborigines have, in the course of long ages, lost their ancient languages and adopted those of their conquerors. The process of linguistic transformation, which may still be observed in other parts of India, would seem to have been carried out more completely in the South than elsewhere. The theory that the Dravidian element is the most ancient which we can discover in the population of Northern India, must also be modified by what we now know of the Munda languages, the Indian representatives of the Austric family of speech, and the mixed languages in which their influence has been traced (p. 43). Here, according to the evidence now available, it would seem that the Austric element is the oldest, and that it has been overlaid in different regions by successive waves of Dravidian and Indo-European on the one hand, and by Tibeto-Chinese on the other. Most ethnologists hold that there is no difference in physical type between the present speakers of Munda and Dravidian languages. This statement has been called in question; but, if it is true, it shows that racial conditions have become so complicated that it is no longer possible to analyse their constituents. Language alone has preserved a record which would otherwise have been lost. At the same time, there can be little doubt that Dravidian languages were actually flourishing in the western regions of Northern India at the period when languages of the Indo-European type were introduced by the Aryan invasions from the north-west. Dravidian characteristics have been traced alike in Vedic and Classical Sanskrit, in the Prakrits, or early popular dialects, and in the modern vernaculars derived from them. The linguistic strata would thus appear to be arranged in the order–Austric, Dravidian, Indo-European.

There is good ground, then, for supposing that, before the coming of the Indo-Aryans speakers the Dravidian languages predominated both in Northern and in Southern India; but, as we have seen, older elements are discoverable in the populations of both regions, and therefore the assumption that the Dravidians are aboriginal is no longer tenable. Is there any evidence to show whence they came into India? … In Google 'The original inhabitants of India', it is mentioned: 'A number of earlier anthropologists held the view that the Dravidian peoples together were a distinct race. However, comprehensive genetic studies have proven

that this is not the case. The original inhabitants of India may be identified with the speakers of the Munda languages, which are unrelated to either Indo-Aryan or Dravidian languages'. Thus the generally accepted view now is that the original inhabitants of India were not the Dravidians but the Pre-Dravidians Munda aborigines whose descendants presently live in parts of Chotanagpur (Jharkhand), Chhattisgarh, Orissa, West Bengal, etc., the Todas of the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu, the tribals in the Andaman Islands, the Adivasis in various parts of India (especially in the forests and hills) e.g. Gonds, Santhals, Bhils, etc. It is not necessary for us to go into further details into this issue, but the facts mentioned above certainly lends support to the view that about 92% people living in India are descendants of immigrants (though more research is required). It is for this reason that there is such tremendous diversity in India. This diversity is a significant feature of our country, and the only way to explain it is to accept that India is largely a country of immigrants. There are a large number of religions, castes, languages, ethnic groups, cultures etc. in our country, which is due to the fact that India is a country of immigrants. Somebody is tall, somebody is short, some are dark, some are fair complexioned, with all kinds of shades in between, someone has Caucasian features, someone has Mongoloid features, someone has Negroid features, etc. There are differences in dress, food habits and various other matters. …As stated above, India has tremendous diversity and this is due to the large scale migrations and invasions into India over thousands of years. The various immigrants/invaders who came into India brought with them their different cultures, languages, religions, etc. which accounts for the tremendous diversity in India. Since India is a country of great diversity, it is absolutely essential if we wish to keep our country united to have tolerance and equal respect for all communities and sects. It was due to the wisdom of our founding fathers that we have a Constitution which is secular in character, and which caters to the tremendous diversity in our country. Thus it is the Constitution of India which is keeping us together despite all our tremendous diversity, because the Constitution gives equal respect to all communities, sects, lingual and ethnic groups, etc. in the country. The Constitution guarantees to all citizens freedom of speech (Article 19), freedom of religion (Article 25), equality (Articles 14 to 17), liberty (Article 21), and etcetera. However, giving formal equality to all groups or communities in India would not result in genuine equality. The historically disadvantaged groups must be given special protection and help so that they can be uplifted from their poverty and low social status. It is for this reason that special provisions have been made in our Constitution in Articles 15(4), 15(5), 16(4), 16(4A), 46, etc. for the upliftment of these groups. Among these disadvantaged groups, the most disadvantaged and marginalized in India are the Adivasis (STs), who, as already mentioned, are the descendants of the original inhabitants of India, and are the most marginalized and living in terrible poverty with high rates of illiteracy, disease, and early mortality.

The plight of Indian tribes has been described by this Court in Samatha vs. State of Andhra Pradesh and Ors. AIR 1997 SC 3297 (vide paragraphs 12 to 15). Hence, it is the duty of all people who love our country to see that no harm is done to the Scheduled Tribes and that they are given all help to bring them up in their economic and social status, since they have been victimized for thousands of years by terrible oppression and atrocities. The mentality of our countrymen towards these tribals must change, and they must be given the respect they deserve as the original inhabitants of India. The bravery of the Bhils was accepted by that great Indian warrior Rana Pratap, who held a high opinion of Bhils as part of his army. The injustice done to the tribal people of India is a shameful chapter in our country's history. The tribes were called 'rakshas' (demons), 'asuras', and what not. They were slaughtered in large numbers, and the survivors and their descendants were degraded, humiliated, and all kinds of atrocities inflicted on them for centuries. They were deprived of their lands, and pushed into forests and hills where they eke out a miserable existence of poverty, illiteracy, disease, etc.

And now efforts are being made by some people to deprive them even of their forest and hill land where they are living, and the forest produce on which they survive. The well known example of the injustice to the tribes is the story of Eklavya in the Adiparva of the Mahabharat. Eklavya wanted to learn archery, but Dronacharya refused to teach him, regarding him as low born. Eklavya then built a statue of Dronacharya and practiced archery before the statue. He would have perhaps become a better archer than Arjun, but since Arjun was Dronacharya's favourite pupil Dronacharya told Eklavya to cut off his right thumb and give it to him as 'guru dakshina' (gift to the teacher given traditionally by the student after his study is complete). In his simplicity Eklavya did what he was told. This was a shameful act on the part of Dronacharya. He had not even taught Eklavya, so what right had he to demand 'guru dakshina', and that too of the right thumb of Eklavya so that the latter may not become a better archer than his favourite pupil Arjun? Despite this horrible oppression on them, the tribes of India have generally (though not invariably) retained a higher level of ethics than the non-tribes in our country. They normally do not cheat, tell lies, and do other misdeeds which many non-tribes do. They are generally superior in character to the non-tribes. It is time now to undo the historical injustice to them. Instances like the one with which we are concerned in this case deserve total condemnation and harsh punishment (*India Human Rights Report*; http://www.achrweb.org).

Adivasi Identity, Indigeneity and Indigenous Movements

Since the 1990s, it is observed that 'a self-styled Indigenous movement has emerged in India which has strengthened the political will and broadened the historical consciousness of many subaltern and marginal communities. Made up of national, regional, district level and grass-roots organisations, this movement seeks to empower 'Adivasis'–a term translated as 'Indigenous and Tribal Peoples'–in relation to the federation of states that rule throughout India' (Rycroft 2014). It is also stated that organisations such as the Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples or *Bharatiya Adivasi Sangamam*, are the current flag-bearers of the Indigenous movement in India, and that its construction of a community of 'Indigenous and Tribal Peoples' resonates in India's federal states where the rights of Scheduled Tribes are ignored, and challenges the narrowness of existing definitions of 'Indigenous Peoples' in inter-governmental discourse, which tend to privilege the colonial encounter, over pre-colonial encounters, in the production of indigeneity (Karlsson 2003: 407-8; Rycroft 2014). It is premised that translation of 'Adivasi' as 'Indigenous and Tribal Peoples' is in itself a strategic move… an Adivasi identity refers to the multiple histories of resistance to and/or negotiation of the discourses and practices of marginalisation by the dominant groups in India, whether they be Hindu feudalists, Moghul governors, British colonials or Indian nationalists (Bates 1995: 105-9; Xaxa 1999: 1519-1524; Rycroft 2014: 1-17).

Such Observations are broadly credible and indeed there are many forceful movements (including Maoist outburst in Adivasi areas) which have challenged the local administrations and the nation-state variously. It is true that the term Adivasi has gained popularity among Indian activists, who have demonstrated their perspective forcefully and convincingly in global platforms. Several international agencies have accepted the problems of the Indian tribespeople as the Adivasi problem; relating the same with the concerns of the larger indigenous people, who are variously engaged in diverse struggles

for autonomy and human rights. Nonetheless, the reality is that the word Adivasi has limited circulation in India, even though some Adivasi fronts do claim to represent all tribes of India. Actually, the Adivasi populace has restricted presence within peninsular India, where the term is associated with ethnicity factor and political mobilisation. It is also seen that there is hardly any political front which unites Adivasis of North and South India. There is no single national 'Indigenous movement'. Thus, there are many Adivasi movements in peninsular India and added tribal movements in other areas (Singh 1982, 1983, 2006). Indian civil society movement also lacks a common all-India platform which may claim to represent the concerns of 'all tribes' of India.[6] There is no single political party representing all tribes of India in one fold. It is therefore one may say that there are numerous indigenous engagements, epitomising Adivasi Indigeneity as well as other indigenes in India.

Indigenous movements in India have a long tradition. Tracing the exploitation in historical perspective, Felix Padel (2014), refers to 'the great tribal rebellions' against British rule and says that these 'rebellions' had their origin in impacts of British invasion–increasing levels of government control and taxation, numerous takeovers of land and forest, and the British instigation to maximize production at the original inhabitants' expense. K.S. Singh (1985) divides the colonial era tribal movements in India into three phases, 1795-1860; 1860-1920 and 1920-1947. During these periods intensive colonialism including penetration of merchant capital ruined tribal economy affecting their relationship with the land and forest. Thus, the Birsa Munda movement in Chhota Nagpur aimed at the 'liquidation of the racial enemies, the Dikus, European missionaries and officials and native Christians. The Mundas would recover their 'lost kingdom'. There will be enough to eat, no famine; the people will live together in love' (Singh 1966: 193, 1983). In fact, K.S. Singh (1982, 2006) has incorporated movements of Adivasi and other tribespeople, including analogous people such as Ahom and Meitei within a single framework of 'tribal movements'.

In the years since Independence, the pace of dispossession has escalated. Tens of thousands of Adivasi–hundreds of thousands even–have been displaced by big dams and by mining and factory projects since the 1950s-60s. Resistance to displacement and takeovers of resources is far from easy. In Odisha, the Gandhamardan movement in the

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[6] The Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD), a federation of forest dwellers and tribal organisations located in eleven states of India appears to be the largest network linking majority of Indian tribes within a single platform. The Campaign includes the following state federations: *Bharat Jan Andolan*, National Front for Tribal Self Rule, *Jangal Adhikar Sangharsh Samiti* (Maharashtra), *Adivasi Mahasabha* (Gujarat), *Adivasi Jangal Janjeevan Andolan* (Dadra and Nagar Haveli), *Jangal Jameen Jan Andolan* (Rajasthan), *Madhya Pradesh Van Adhikar Abhiyan* (Madhya Prasad), *Jan Shakti Sanghatan* (Chhattisgarh), Peoples Alliance for Livelihood Rights, *Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha*, *Orissa Jan Sangharsh Morcha*, Campaign for Survival and Dignity (Orissa), *Orissa Adivasi Manch*, *Orissa Jan Adhikar Morcha*, *Adivasi Aikya Vedike* (Andhra Prasad), Campaign for Survival and Dignity (Tamil Nadu), *Bharat Jan Andolan* (Jharkhand). CSD is an all-India coalition consisting with activists spread in eleven states of India. They fight for tribal self-rule and also non-tribal issues. Recently, in its policy paper this national alliance has clarified a number of concerns that have been raised regarding the impact of the FRA, 2006 in different parts of India, especially in Northeastern States of India, where the constitutional provisions of sixth schedule and 371, A and G are stumbling blocks.

mid-eighties brought together Adivasis and many non-tribal activists, preventing bauxite mining on a luxuriantly forested sacred mountain range in West Odisha, by facing countless arrests and beatings. Adivasi resisters in Kashipur from the 1990s have faced ferocious levels of intimidation and repression, culminating in the Maikanch police firing that killed three in December 2000, and again from 2004 till today (Padel 2014). Contemporary 'development induced displacements' at Odisha's Kashipur, Lanjigarh and Kalinganagar are regarded by Binay Kumar Pattnaik as illustrations of 'New Social Movements'. These three are resistance movements against mining based heavy metal industries (the Tata Steel at Kalinganagar, Utkal Alumina Industries Ltd. at Kashipur and Vedanta Alumina Ltd. at Lanjigarh) are not only led by tribal leaders; but there is increasing role of the civil society (intellectuals, mass media, activist's organizations and NGOs) in shaping the course of the movement. Pattnaik argues that since the early 1980s micro movements in India have become points of convergence of such protests as movements by the landless, peasants, fishermen, Adivasis/tribals and displaced people fighting for livelihood, opportunities, dignity and development. These people's movements also raise the issue of violation of human rights (Pattnaik 2014). The resistance, which we see in Odisha, Chhattisgarh, north Andhra and Jharkhand are basically tribal movements, arising in response to unbearable levels of exploitation and dispossession. As such, they are distinct from the Maoist insurgency, even when Maoists offer them support–support which is often used by government representatives and the media to paint the movements as Maoist when they are not. There has been considerable emphasis recently on critiquing 'ecological romanticism' that seems to idealize tribal cultures (Prasad 2003), or to set up a false image of 'the ecological noble savage'–'eco-incarceration' in Alpa Shah's phrase (2012). Alpa Shah's argument arose in a review of Arundhati Roy's *Walking with the Comrades* (2010), suggesting that Roy's writing traps Adivasis in identity politics rather than revealing the Maoist conflict's roots in class struggle. In this respect, Felix Padel highlights that Adivasis' dispossession from their land is often termed 'Development-Induced Displacement', whereby the tribal people exist on a 'final frontier' of invasion and takeover of their land and territories, as resources get scarcer in a capitalist system whose growth expands beyond what the earth seems able to sustain (New Internationalist 2011). Felix Padel (2014) argues that social structure of a tribal community is destroyed at every level by displacement: the material culture of items grown and made by hand is replaced by factory made products; an economy based on a long tradition of skilled techniques of cultivation and use of forest is replaced by classification as 'unskilled labour' and a degrading dependence on wage labour; control over the local environment and channelling of water sources is replaced by the lowest level of social status in a highly polluted environment; and so on. Moreover, communities are painfully divided into those for and against a project, and traditional systems of values are overturned by the assault on features of the natural environment always regarded as sacred. Precisely because these processes of destruction are so extensive, yet so little recognized. According to Felix Padel 'Cultural Genocide' is the appropriate term for processes of change being imposed onto Adivasi communities. This destruction is almost invisible in the mainstream media most of the time, so passes almost unnoticed by much of mainstream society. Even at the grass-roots, so derogatory are mainstream attitudes towards tribal cultures in Odisha and neighbouring states that,

for example, the majority of non-tribals employed as school-teachers in Adivasi schools tend to show little or no interest in learning about Adivasi culture. The learning process tends to be uni-directional, with little reciprocity. 'Sustainable Development' and 'Corporate Social Responsibility' are regularly used as a mask that conceals the genocide, presenting a picture of benefits completely at variance with grassroots situations. Felix refers to B.D. Sharma (1984, 1992) who has delineated the web of poverty that enmeshes tribal areas, and spelt out the structural flaws in the present system of tribal development.

Here it may be appropriate, however, to explain a bit about the resistance and resurgence factor involved in indigenous struggle even in adverse social setting. An important issue is raised about continued existence of indigeneity in the event of 'displacement' or detachment from native territory. Under such conditions, indeed the indigenous culture and identity simply do not vanish as we notice in case of the tea tribes of Assam who have been detached from their 'home-lands' for two centuries but have all the more jealously preserved their culture and identity. In contrast to their kindred in original homeland (Jharkhand and neighborhood) the Assam Tea tribes, who served as slave-like 'coolies' in tea plantations, have been strategically kept outside the official 'Scheduled Tribe' list. Hence, these sixty and odd different tea-tribes have formed common political fronts by adopting a singular nomenclature 'Adivasi' and celebrating their tribal festivals regularly to preserve their culture and identity (Das 2015). For the Assam tea tribes, who are fiercely fighting to be recognized as 'Scheduled Tribe', the essence of enduring as indigenous (i.e. indigeneity) echoes their intrinsic spirit.

Discussion

Indigeneity is a global phenomenon, central to discussions of political and legal rights of indigenous peoples. In this critique, we have broadly placed the issue of indigeneity in global and Indian contexts in order to understand the rights of indigenous peoples. It is argued that there are enough evidences which amply demonstrate that India's tribespeople are 'the indigenous people' of India and they have substantial residency in most of south Asia and significant linkages beyond. Everywhere they continue to suffer from 'primitiveness' and 'backwardness'.

The issue of global environmental concern vis-à-vis indigeneity could not be discussed above on account of lack of space. Indigenous environmental activists have articulated their views on declarations made by indigenous environmental activists since 2000. One core principle, related to indigenous environmental knowledge, is the conviction that the earth is a living being with rights and it is the responsibility of indigenous peoples to protect the earth from over-exploitation. Thus, there are immense scopes to reframe the scope of indigeneity in terms of values, identities and knowledge systems, a unified 'indigenous worldview'. It is highlighted that indigeneity in conjunction with indigenous knowledge could be especially supportive in multiple ways to achieve political recognition and advancement (Jung 2008).

As we discussed, the discourses of indigenous movements, indigenous resource rights, and the 'recognition' of indigenous status raise issues about the convention and ethics of research and pose moral challenges to anthropologists. The question remains whether

'indigeneity' should be principally rejected because of its cultural essentialism, deconstructed within contemporary anthropology, or whether its 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak 1988) should be politically endorsed in order to pragmatically improve the living conditions of marginalized groups. Despite disagreements, global anthropologists have endorsed the concept of indigeneity and advocated its employment as a political tool. Indian anthropology, as our review suggests, broadly suffers from its inertia to indulge in issues of genuine tribal narratives; land rights, poverty, displacement, social exclusion, gender issues and tribal dissent. It is argued that social scientists have largely neglected the Northeast region where we find the indigeneity used as a political tool systematically (Das 2013). Felix Padel (2014) has rightly criticized dominant trend in Indian anthropology wherein the mainstream analysis of tribal cultures still tends to understand them in terms of 'primitiveness' or 'backwardness'–a view basically established by colonial anthropology, that was geared towards controlling and 'civilizing' India's 'savage tribes'. The entry of the private capital to the resource rich tribal societies has intensified debates on the political economy of dispossession, displacement and tribal rights. In anthropology, it is mainly the issues of research priority, ethics and the definition (of indigeneity), which have created impasse and dilemma. There is need to diverge from such predicaments and reorient anthropological studies to fit into the domain of indigenous rights.

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An Enquiry into Santal Wall Painting Practices in Singhbhum[1]

Gauri Bharat

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Architecture, CEPT University, Ahmedabad, India
PhD Candidate, Department of Art History, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK

Abstract

In this paper, I examine wall painting practices among Santals in the erstwhile Singhbhum region[2] in order to highlight local differences between visual forms and practices. I argue that developments in painting tradition must be contextualised within larger social, economic and political conditions of the locality at large, which in turn must be seen as part of a larger trajectory of transformation in regional Santal architecture. By examining local variations through the framework of processes of making, this paper makes a case for a nuanced understanding of traditional Adivasi built environments not as static, ahistorical architectural objects as characterised in traditional architectural discourses but rather, as dynamic entities meshed within complex transformative contexts.

Introduction

As W.G Archer remarked about Santal houses, 'the mud walls have a hard cement-like precision, a suave and solid neatness, and the roofs, softly thatched or ribbed with tiles, compose a vista of gently blending curves. Even in the rains the walls contrive to keep their trimness. Of all the other tribes of eastern India, none has quite the same relish for neatly ordered houses, the same capacity for tidy spacious living or the same genius for domestic architecture.' (Archer 1974: 20) While Santal architecture varies considerably across different parts of eastern India, Archer's statement certainly holds true for the eastern Singhbhum region, which is the area under study in this paper.[3] Compared to the architectural traditions of other Adivasi communities in the region, Santals are locally

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[1] A version of this paper was presented at "From floor to ceiling – Symposium on South Asian floor drawings and murals," held at the University of Westminster, on 27 and 28 October 2013. I would like to thank my PhD supervisors Dr. Daniel Rycroft and Prof. John Mack from the University of East Anglia for their comments on this work.

[2] Erstwhile Singhbhum district has been divided into East and West Singhbhum and Seraikela-Kharsawan districts belonging to Jharkhand state.

[3] Among the local population in Singhbhum, it is widely accepted that Santal dwellings are the best examples of workmanship and decoration in the region. In a study of their houses in Bolpur in West Bengal however, Dey does not suggest a similarly superlative sense of craftsmanship. In fact, he even points out that practices such as application of bright colours on walls is unusual. This suggests that building practices and traditions vary and Santal dwellings may not be equally outstanding architectural examples in other places as they are in Singhbhum (Dey 2007).

renowned for their craftsmanship and precision in building, plastering and decorating their dwellings (Fig.1). In this paper, I examine Santal wall paintings in three different localities of Potka, Ghatsila and Kandra within the east Singhbhum region and highlight the differences in both practices and visual forms of the paintings. I argue that the shifts and developments in painting tradition in some villages must be contextualised within larger social, economic and political conditions of the locality at large and seen as part of a larger trajectory of transformation in regional Santal architecture.

Fig. 1: Views of Santal houses

The paper draws from my on-going doctoral research into conceptions of space and place among Santals in east Singhbhum. In my research I examine the processes of production, use, transformation and signification of Santal dwellings in order to construct a Santal architectural history. Compared to dominant architectural history narratives that focus largely on built forms as objects, I examine architecture through the lens of processes. This allows the construction of an architectural history that is empirically situated within the lives and times of the inhabitants and contextualised in relation to the region rather than being focused on aesthetic or formal evaluations alone. What is interesting is that in this process, not only is the architectural object re-imagined as a transforming (rather) than static entity, but so are the contexts. This is an important shift from traditional architectural histories where society is often considered as a fixed stratum from which architectural forms draw meaning.[4] The context of Singhbhum is not a mute backdrop to architectural transformation but becomes implicated as the milieu within which Santal architecture and by extension Santal lives and experiences are shaped in particular ways.In short, by examining Santal built environments through the framework of processes of making, this paper makes a case for a nuanced understanding of traditional Adivasi built environments not as static, ahistorical architectural objects as

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[4] For a discussion on the relationship between architecture, culture and society in academic scholarship, (see Crysler 2003).

characterised in traditional architectural discourses but rather, as dynamic entities meshed within the complex, transformative context of Singhbhum.

Three case study villages are considered in this paper, one from each of the localities of Potka and Ghatsila in East Singhbhum and Kandra in the Seraikela-Kharsawan districts respectively.[5] The villages are Bhagabandh (lying between Jamshedpur and Ghatsila in the Golmuri–cum–Jugsalai block in East Singhbhum), Bada Bandua (in the Potka Block in East Singhbhum) and Chauda (in the Gamharia Block the in Seraikela–Kharsawan district) (Fig.2).

Fig. 2: Location of case study villages (highlighted text)

The wall painting forms and practices in these villages are representative of those within the localities at large. Further, walls paintings in Bhagaband and Bada Bandua–both located in East Singhbhum –are similar while the wall paintings in Chauda – located in the Seraikela-Kharsawan district – are noticeably different.[6] Santals in East Singhbhum paint their walls in horizontal bands and typically with coloured clays while the Seraikela

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[5] I use locality in Arjun Appadurai's sense of a 'produced' and relational entity rather than a bounded spatial or geographic one. He argues that localities are a 'complex phenomenological entity, constituted by a series of links between social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts.' (Appadurai 1988: 178).

[6] It must be iterated here that variations in wall painting practices do not correspond to precise administrative boundaries of the regions discussed here. When speaking of the differences in wall paintings in Seraikela and East Singhbhum, I refer to broad commonalities among villages in these regions and fully recognise that there are subtle variations within the regions themselves.

region has more complex geometric designs or motifs painted and use artificial colours to a greater extent. A starting point for the analysis of these differences is provided by Rycroft's study of Adivasi mural aesthetics in the Purulia district of West Bengal in eastern India (Rycroft 1996: 67-81). He examines a range of art practices such as domestic murals, tattoos, ritual events and performing arts and compares Santal practices to those of neighbouring Bhumij and Kurmi communities in order to explore a broader Kheroal aesthetic.[7] In the analysis, he focuses on techniques, motifs, and interactions between different Adivasis and Adivasi–Hindu communities respectively. In terms of technique, he suggests that particular gestures of the hand produce particular rhythms of design while in terms of motifs, women draw upon their natural environment and make stylized paddy plants or trees common to the area (Rycroft 1996: 71, 77). He also outlines the interactions through which decorative ideas are interchanged; for instance, Adivasi labourers are hired to paint the walls of Hindu families who are at a higher position within social hierarchy, and in the process bring their own aesthetics of stylized floral motifs to the painting of Hindu dwellings. In short, Rycroft highlights some of the important parameters for examining wall painting practices, i.e., forms and motifs of wall designs, symbolic references to Adivasi environments, similarities of aesthetics across different Adivasi artistic practices, and mobility of these peoples and the spread their motifs to non-Adivasi dwellings as well. Drawing from this discussion, in this paper, I analyze wall paintings in terms of tools and techniques, networks of material resources, villagers' own aesthetic evaluations, and broader social, economic and political changes in the region in order to account for differences in Santal wall paintings and more specifically, the design developments observed in the Seraikela region.

The Practice of Wall Painting

In order to understand the process of wall painting, it is important to begin with the basic construction material of the dwelling and the structure of the wall as a whole. Santal dwellings are built in *murrum mati* – a locally available clayey soil – and walls are typically quite thick, ranging from thirty five to forty five centimetres.[8] Being built entirely in mud, the walls require protection from rainfall, which is done in two ways.[9] First, the roofs of these houses have considerable overhangs that protect most part of the wall from rain. Second, the smooth plastering and painting further create a surface that allows rain to wash off the wall surface immediately. The process of plastering and preparing the wall for paint is an elaborate one and begins after the wall is built and the

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[7] Kheroal refers to a group of communities including Santals, Mundas, Hos and the 'more Hinduized Bhumij' and 'they all traditionally share the same creation myth, believing they evolved from the male and female Kheroal eggs and together they share an extremely vibrant cultural lifestyle' (Rycroft 1996, 67).

[8] The thickness is required on account of the structural stability of the wall i.e. *murrum mati* as a building material dictates the thickness of the wall, together with the fact the walls are built entirely in *murrum mati* and do not have any form of reinforcement within. In other words, if made any thinner, the wall will collapse.

[9] Protection from the rain is important because the Singhbhum region has heavy rainfall both in the form of storms during the summer months i.e. between March and May and during the monsoon months i.e. between June and August or September.

roofs are added.[10] Plaster is made of very fine *murrum mati*, mixed with cow dung and bits of straw or rice husk.[11] The straw or husk serves to reinforce the plaster layer and prevents it from cracking. Women are solely responsible for plastering and painting, and often help in building the wall as well. They apply the plaster mixture on the wall by hand and smoothen it out. When it has set but is still a little damp, women scrub the surface with a stone to make is very smooth. After this surface dries, a thin layer of cow dung is applied as a wash on the wall after which it is ready to be painted.[12]

Only the exterior walls of the dwelling are painted in colours, while the interiors of rooms are usually just painted white (Fig.3). Even within the exterior walls, women pay particular attention to the front elevation that faces the street. This is the first wall to be painted to ensure that they do not run short of colours.[13] Other walls may be painted with diluted colours or even left plain if they run short. The design scheme broadly comprises horizontal bands of colour with a dark base in the form of a *pide* (plinth used as seat at the base of the wall) and other colours above (see Fig. 1 and 3). The colours typically used are white, ochre, red, black (from burnt straw or even tyres these days) and blue (from mixing chemical indigo with white clay).

Fig. 3: Interior walls of a Santal house
(Note the plain white colour of the walls as compared to the brightly coloured external walls)

While these colours naturally occur the in the Singhbhum region, they are not all available in the vicinity of every village. Villagers travel considerable distances to

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[10] The walls are constructed using a cob technique where lumps of prepared *murrum mati* are placed directly in the foundations and the wall in order to build it up. Once the lumps are in place, they are smoothened out by hand and allowed to dry, after which the next layer is added. In this manner, the wall is built up layer by layer.

[11] This fine clay is usually collected from pond beds or beds of other water bodies in vicinity of the village. Personal conversation with B. Hansdah (Bhagabandh) and M. Murmu (Chauda) in February and March 2013.

[12] Personal conversations with B. Hansdah (Bhagabandh), N. Hansdah (Chauda) and A. Murmu (Bada Bandua) in February and March 2013.

[13] This rationale was suggested by women in the case study villages themselves.

procure the necessary colours for their walls.[14] The particularity with which most Santals get colours suggests that wall paintings are a significant part of Santal domestic architecture.

Moving to the details of wall designs, as mentioned earlier, two broad categories of designs were observed across the case study localities. First, schemes with only horizontal bands of colour, which may be considered as a generic design scheme used by Adivasi and non-Adivasi communities in the Singhbhum region at large. Within this generic scheme what distinguishes Santal wall painting is the use of a wide palette of colours while other communities typically use red and white alone. The second scheme of wall painting is where elaborate geometric or floral motifs as added within the horizontal bands and this, as I mentioned earlier, is observed in the villages in the Seraikela region. Before moving on to the nature and contexts of these two kinds of design developments, it is useful to understand the techniques and aesthetic considerations in each case.

The designs with horizontal bands are made using ropes that are held tight across the wall and the lines marked. Within these bands, colours are applied with a piece of cloth dipped in the clay or paint mixture similar to the plastering of floors in interior spaces. Women work with horizontal strokes to create blocks of colour at a time and they move across the wall by painting vertical columns of colour. The performance of painting and the resultant effect is very similar to way in which women plaster the floors of the interior parts of their house.[15] They dip a piece of cloth into an ash or cow dung mixture and apply it in horizontal strokes in the floor. As in the case of the wall, they work in blocks until the entire floor surface is covered (Fig.4).

Fig. 4: Floor plastering in internal courtyard.
(Note the horizontal strokes visible in plastered floor)

In both cases, women pay particular attention to using horizontal strokes, producing a smooth and even surface, and ensuring precise edges for the plastered and painted

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[14] This was mentioned by many villagers who specified villages where particular colours were found.

[15] I refer here to the plastering of interior floors including the courtyard of the houses, which is done using a piece of cloth dipped in a dung or ash mixture, rather than exterior floors, where a thin layer of cow dung plaster is applied using a broom.

surfaces. It is evident that not only are the techniques of floor plastering and wall painting similar, but that women aim to achieve a similar aesthetic quality as well.

The similarities between the floor plastering and wall painting technique is important to note since it suggests a continuity between the two.This continuity may be established by examining the process of transformation of Santal dwellings in the Singhbhum region at large. During the 19th century, typical Santal houses were known as *kumbaha*.[16] The walls of the *kumbaha* were made of panels of branches while the roof was made of leaf thatch and the ground outside the house was plastered to demarcate a social space in front of the dwelling.[17] As communities became more sedantarized towards the end of the nineteenth century, the almost temporary *kumbaha* dwellings began to get plastered in mud and eventually transformed into houses built entirely in mud known as *orak*.[18] One may argue then that techniques of plastering the ground were carried on to the plastering of walls as well and therefore one finds a similarity of practice and aesthetic considerations between the two. Where this continuity becomes even more important is in the nature of design schemes that emerge on walls. I mentioned earlier that the dominant design scheme in two of the three case study localities – and in the Singhbhum region at large – is horizontal bands of colour. Even in the scheme with elaborate designs and motifs, the basic background onto which these details are added are horizontal bands. Considering dominance of bands and the similarities of the bodily gesture through which these designs are produced, one may argue that the horizontality of the design and the aesthetics of precision are rooted in the performance of wall painting itself.

Design Developments in Wall Painting Practices in Seraikela

The more elaborate designs observed in Seraikela include geometric shapes or floral motifs added within the basic design scheme of horizontal bands of colour (Fig. 5 and 6).

Fig. 5: Geometric shapes added within horizontal
bands in Chauda village in Seraikela

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[16] It must be noted that *kumbaha* was the commonly built house type while wealthier families built *ath-chala*, which a large and more elaborate house made of *murrum mati*.

[17] Reconstructed from oral descriptions of *kumbaha* by elderly people in the case study villages who recollected seeing such houses in their childhood.

[18] The sedentarisation occurred through the late 19th and early 20th centuries on account of complex interconnected factors ranging from increasing agricultural practices and reduction in forest cover, increasing industrial activity in the region to introduction of new forms of land and forest legislation. These shifts impacted Adivasi communities in that they increasingly became dispossessed from their land and forests and settled as communities of agriculturists or labourers (Das Gupta and Basu 2012).

In general, different walls of the dwelling may have different designs but the best design and workmanship is reserved for the front wall of the dwelling facing the *kulhi*.[19] What is interesting is that it is only Santal houses in the Seraikela region where such design developments are to be seen while other communities continue to paint their walls in horizontal bands with one or two colours. In order to account for these design developments, it is useful to examine technique once again. I discussed earlier that the horizontal bands are painted in horizontal strokes with a piece of cloth. The elaborate designs schemes differ from the horizontal band schemes in three ways.

Fig. 6: Floral patterns added within horizontal
bands in Beltad village in Seraikela

First, they cannot be executed with cloth dipped in colour but require the use of a brush. In some cases the bands of colour that form that background for geometric patterns or motifs are painted with cloth while the details are added by brush while in other cases, the entire wall is painted using a brush.[20] Second, the palette of colours observed here is much wider–and indeed brighter–since villagers in this region use artificial colours more than what was observed in other case study villages. Third, in terms of time, elaborate patterns take much longer to execute as compared to a wall with bands of colour can be completed in two or three hours.[21] Consequently, the development of elaborate designs is not just a shift in forms but in the meshwork of resources and knowledge as well. The question that emerges is how and why did such shifts occur in the Seraikela alone as compared to other parts of the Singhbhum region.

Before moving to that discussion, it is important to iterate that there is a similarity of wall painting tradition across the entire region but that the trajectory of design development diverged in Seraikela. This is seen in the fact that the underlying design scheme even in Seraikela is of horizontal bands. This was evident in cases where an already painted wall became damaged due to untimely rains or when women ran short of

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[19] Personal conversation with M.Handah in February 2013.

[20] Personal conversations in Chauda village in March 2013.

[21] Personal conversations with women in case study villages in February and March 2013.

time for painting on account of their other domestic responsibilities.[22] In such cases, they painted the walls in plain bands of colour as a temporary measure until they found time to add details or until next cycle on painting. It becomes clear that even with transformations in design the horizontal ordering of walls designs remain important.

Contextualising the Differences in Design Development

The divergence of wall painting practices into elaborate designs in Seraikela can only be accounted for in terms of the wider social, economic and political changes in the region at large. Beginning once again with technique, a key difference in wall painting in the Seraikela region as compared to other case study localities is the introduction and use of brushes. The use of brushes is both a technical and a conceptual shift. First, it is technical in that it brings about a number of material changes such as in the consistency of colours to be used. It also changes the bodily gesture of painting itself since brushes are typically used in vertical rather than horizontal strokes.[23] Second, it is a conceptual shift given that earlier memories of painting – both in terms of performance and design – must now be negotiated in terms of the possibilities afforded by the new medium of the brush. So even with a brush, women continue to paint horizontal bands, but the bands are now wider in order to be painted in vertical strokes.

The new medium further raises questions about the conditions under which the use of brushes became commonplace in the Seraikela region. Given the otherwise sparse material culture of Santal communities and the primarily paddy cultivating way of life,[24] the brush does not naturally feature in Santal daily life. In other words, it is not a skill embedded in the practices of everyday lives of typical Santal families and was obviously acquired by Santal women somewhere beyond the village. One may argue here that women may have acquired the skill of using brushes in the many construction sites and small-scale industrial establishments that dot the landscape of Seraikela. While Singhbhum in general has a high concentration of industrial and mining activity (Karan 1953: 218-19). Seraikela particularly has large numbers of small and medium-scale manufacturing industries where Santals and other Adivasis are employed as labourers. Two factors underlie this equation of Adivasi involvement as construction and industrial labourers in this part of Singhbhum. First, compared to other parts of Singhbhum such as the river valleys of the Subernarakha and Kharkai Rivers, the Seraikela region is less fertile and has lower agricultural productivity. (Karan 1953: 218-19) Therefore, more Adivasi families seek employment as wage labourers in order to earn their livelihood. Second, the nature of wage employment is different in Seraikela as well. Compared to other areas where industrial activities are in the form of mining or heavy metallurgical industries, Seraikela is developing as a small-scale industrial belt and has therefore seen significant construction activity. It is this form of wage labour that creates the possibility of exposure to the use of brushes, which then becomes a part of the Santal domestic art repertoire as well. In short, it is the particular economic and geographic conditions of

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[22] Personal conversation with D. Murmu in Chauda in March 2013.

[23] That the brushes are used in vertical strokes was evident in close examination of the wall surfaces.

[24] Objects found in Santal houses in the case study areas are typically tools such as knives, axes and spades, agricultural implements such as carts, fishing equipment, and domestic items such as utensils.

Seraikela that led to the use of brushes on account of which new wall painting possibilities emerged.

The exposure to brushes however is not sufficient impetus for its use. As the use of brushes and artificial paint became probable and popular, it must have become more easily available as well. Domestic needs and everyday goods used by villagers are typically made at home–as in the case of brooms or fishing traps or purchased at weekly markets – as in the case of clothes and cosmetics. In the case study village of Chauda for instance, Kolabira is the location of a weekly market nearest to Chauda and salesmen set up stalls selling clothes, vegetables, cosmetics, medicines, tools and households essentials. Such markets are held at various locations on different days of the week and villagers usually visited the market nearest to them. Many salesmen at these markets were Adivasi villagers and earned their living by buying goods from Jamshedpur (the nearest urban centre) and selling them at various weekly markets.[25] The high mobility of the salesmen allows them to gauge people's requirements quite well and one may conjecture that when brushes and paints began to become popular, they eventually become available in weekly markets as well.

Returning to the designs themselves, a wide range of designs was observed across the Seraikela region.[26] These designs, as I mentioned earlier, include bold geometric patterns, floral motifs, and in one example, elaborate sculpted columns as well (Figs. 7, 8 and 9).

Fig. 7: Geometric designs in different houses in Chauda village

What is important to note here is that particular designs are localised within villages rather than being similar or common across the region. In order to understand the

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[25] Personal conversation with cloth salesmen in Kolabira market in March 2013.

[26] The analysis focuses on three case study villages visited between January and April 2012. For this discussion however I have also included Mahotabeda - a village from the same region studied by Shah (Shah 2009).

localisation of designs or motifs, one needs to examine the sources of design inspiration and therefore examine women's mobility since it is they who conceptualise and execute these works. On asking where women drew their inspiration from, they often answered that they drew whatever they liked.[27] While it is beyond the scope of this study to suggest how particular visual forms emerge in Santal wall paintings or what their relationship to women's everyday experiences of their environments may be, one may safely contend that women draw inspiration from each other given that designs within a village appear similar over time and that women spend most of their time in the village itself. In other words, one cannot conjecture how design innovation occurs in the first instance, but having occurred, it does disseminate within the village on account of women's internal movements. Even neighbouring villages may not influence each other because women have no or occasion to interact with other villages except their maternal homes.[28] Consequently, design developments are similar within and largely limited to the vicinity of individual villages alone.

Fig. 8: Floral designs in different houses in Beltad village

The relationship between women's mobility and design development also raises questions about the temporality of the development. In other words, while women draw inspiration from other women, it must be remembered that wall painting is an individual act rather than collective one. Over what period of time then do designs spread and become popular in a village? Considering the process of painting and women's mobility in greater detail provides some cues. During a single season of painting (typically in October or November) women begin painting their walls while simultaneously managing their other domestic and agricultural responsibilities. Given that the walls have to ready

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[27] Personal conversation with women in Bhagabandh and Chauda in February and March 2013 respectively.

[28] During fieldwork, I observed that women often did not appear to know about houses at the end of their *kulhi*. They questioned me about other houses I visited, and when I asked why they did not know, they said that there had no reason to visit other houses far from their own. Women did however walk into their immediate neighbours' houses and as far as the nearest well or hand pump to fetch water. In short, women's movements within the village are restricted to the vicinity of their own homes or the nearest source of water.

before Sohrae,[29] the window for completing the painting task is quite small. Additionally, prior to the actual painting, women plan the designs and procure necessary material such as colours.[30] So even if women see interesting designs being executed by other women, they are unlikely to be able to modify their own plans and paint new designs immediately. They will typically have to wait until the following year before that can introduce any new designs or elements in their walls. This means that design ideas will require at least two or three annual cycles of painting before they become popular and common in a village.

The possibility of a slow spread of design ideas is exemplified in the case ofMahotabeda, which has unique sculpted columns in many houses in the village (Fig.9). To make this, columns are first built up in square or rectangular forms and are then carved into the desired shapes and painted.[31] In subsequent years, columns may be repainted but not carved again since that would make the columns weak. In terms of popular building practice, these columns are both unusual, elaborate and time consuming to construct.[32] So if one or two families in Mahotabeda decided–at some point in the past–to introduce an element such as a sculpted column and other families wished to adopt the idea, they must have waited until the next cycle of building and painting in order to incorporate it into their own dwellings. In this manner, over a few annual cycles of painting, a complex design idea may spread within a village.

Fig. 9: Sculpted columns in different houses in Mahotabeda village (Image source: Dhaval Shah)

It is useful at this point to look at the aesthetic considerations that underlie the practices and therefore influence the nature of design developments as well. This may be

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[29] An annual Santal festival that takes place in October or November.

[30] As one woman in Bhagabandh pointed out, time for wall painting had to be managed within other domestic responsibilities and in her specific, as the mother of two young children, she did not find the time to paint the walls before the festival.

[31] As described by villagers in Tirildih village near Chauda, March 2013.

[32] Particularly because the addition of columns is usually to *chali* (verandah). So making such columns goes hand in hand with the addition of a space.

done through women's own evaluations of wall painting designs.[33] In order to get people's opinion, I displayed photographs of a set of painted walls (among other images of dwellings and the settlement) in the *kulhi* and invited villagers to pick the wall they considered the best.[34] The designs ranged from sculpted columns, patterns with vertical stripes, a floral pattern, and a few geometric patterns (Fig.10 and 11).

Fig.10: Display in *kulhi* in Chauda village

Villagers were unanimous in their choice of a particular wall painted in pink and green designs on a white background (Fig.12).
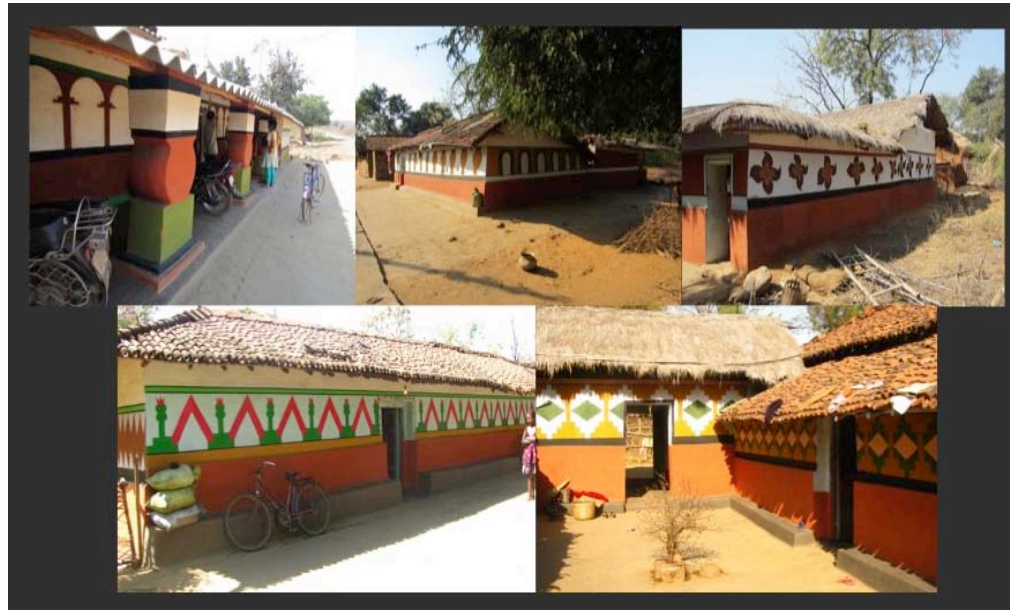
Fig.11: Images of front elevations displayed in *kulhi*

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[33] The premise here is that wall painting may be understood as a public gesture by the family, and women – as the practitioners – may be in a position to articulate what a good or bad wall painting is.

[34] Photographs and drawings, as a visual research method adopted in all three case study villages, have drawn on 'Chapter 6 – Imagining and representing Santal built environments' of my Ph.D. dissertation.

They explained that the design was good since it did not have crooked lines, not too many colours had been used, and that the design resembled blooming flowers. In another instance, watching me photograph a particular wall, it was pointed out to me that the wall was not particularly well painted since the edges of the blocks of colour were not precise but slightly overlapped each other to create a fuzzy edge.

Fig.12: Wall design unanimously selected by villagers as the best

These evaluations suggest that precision in painting may be an important consideration. One may further contend that straight lines and geometric shapes are also preferred given that villagers appreciated the geometric semblance to flowers rather than a design with flowers itself.[35] The desire for geometric forms is an interesting aesthetic consideration in light of the techniques of wall painting and the proposition of its continuities with floor plastering practices. In other words, even when designs diverge and develop as they have in the Seraikela region, an attitude to precision and a preference for geometric forms persist, possibly on account of its continuity to plastering and painting in horizontal bands in the past. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the contents of the wall paintings in any detail, the developments in Seraikela suggest that with shifts in tools and practices, wall painting designs negotiate new motifs in relation to memories of past practices.

Having framed the transformation in wall painting designs between memories of past practices and possibilities afforded by new media i.e. paint brushes, it is important to ask why Seraikela alone became the site of such developments.[36] A brief history of the nature of political rule in Seraikela suggests some cues. Compared to Dalbhum and other parts of East Singhbhum that were under colonial governments prior to Indian independence, Seraikela was a royal estate (Hakim 1953). It is a well-known fact that the royal family

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[35] It is interesting to note that the wall with flowers was a rear wall. Obviously the woman who painted it did not consider it an appropriate design for the front wall of her house.

[36] Also, given that all Adivasi communities in Seraikela faced similar circumstances of negotiating design memories and new possibilities, why does one find a profusion of design development among Santals alone? While there may not be satisfactory answer to the question, the design developments among Santal walls paintings definitely does justice to the general belief that Santal craftsmanship in house building is distinctly different from those of other Adivasi communities.

was considered cruel and repressive.[37] One example of repression was the implementation of a form of tax which decreed that if any subject of Seraikela possessed anything that was better than the ruler's own possessions, the ruler was entitled to claim it as his own.[38] In terms of dwellings, no one was allowed to build or decorate their dwellings better than the ruler's own palace.[39] With the merger of royal estates and the Indian Union after Independence in 1947, Santals were no longer compelled to paint their houses in a simple fashion and I argue that this was a trigger for elaborate design developments in the region.[40] This corresponds to a village elder's observation that the elaborate designs seen on walls today are a recent development and were unheard of two or three generations ago.[41] In other words, in the decades since the dissolution of the royal rule in Seraikela around Indian independence, Santals began to develop more elaborate wall painting designs. Seen against the background of the political climate of Seraikela, I argue that the profusion of elaborate designs may have emerged as a reaction to a history of aesthetic repression in the region. This historical factor considered together with the close correlation between women's restricted mobility and the development of wall painting designs and practices as taking place primarily within villages themselves may also serve to explain why these practices did not extend beyond the Seraikela region as a whole.

Conclusion

In this paper, I examined wall painting practices among Santals in three villages in Singhbhum in order to account for similarities and differences in practice. I attempted to trace the trajectory of transformation of practices and particularly the divergences observed in Seraikela using what may be considered as a cultural ecology perspective. The intention was to examine wall paintings as situated practices rather than as visual forms alone. What this enquiry revealed is ways in which the social, economic and political circumstances of Seraikela may correlate to Santal design and architectural development. More significantly, the study highlights that non-canonical architectural traditions such as those of Adivasis are most usefully examined in terms of processes in order that one takes cognizance of the various interrelations between resources, skills and motivations as employed by Santals themselves and thereby gives greater agency to inhabitants and makers within architectural discourses.

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[37] Personal conversation with R. Tudu in Chauda in March 2013.

[38] This was known as the Nazrana Tax and is recorded by Hakim (1953).

[39] Personal conversation with village elders in Chauda in March 2013.

[40] During discussions with Santal organizations and scholars in March 2014, they concurred with this line of thought and agreed that the repressive rule in Seraikela may have been a trigger for the particular design developments seen in Seraikela.

[41] This was pointed out by the *manjhi*'s (headman) father in Chauda who recollects having seen much simpler wall designs when he was a child about sixty years ago. Personal conversation with R. Tudu in March 2013.

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Adivasi (Indigenous people) Perception of Landscape: The Case of Manbhum

Nirmal Kumar Mahato

Patha-Bhavana, Visva-Bharati University

Abstract

This paper seeks to study the process how an Adivasi village was formed and how different sacred institutions were created in order to facilitate biological resource management. It also intends to focus on the Adivasi agency in effective landscape management that contends the romantic stereotype that they were incapable of managing resources. The essay also seeks to combat the romantic stereotype that Adivasis lived in complete harmony with nature and did not distort the nature. Though the spread of ruralisation and peasantisation among the Adivasis had serious impact on the landscape, both the forest-dependent and agriculturist Adivasis had skills to manage and reproduce natural/biological resources, based on their indigenous knowledge, socio-cultural practices and religious believes. Colonial intervention had catastrophic impact on the Adivasi landscape. With the creation of private property in land and hierarchical property structure, social solidarity and headmanship of Adivasi villages was broken down. The colonial concept of village was radically different from the Adivasi perception. Adivasi villages were transformed into revenue unit. Sacred institutions of the Adivasis faced new challenges. The essay finally argues that the post colonial policy makers as also the academicians should keep the Adivasi ideas of landscape in mind while formulating their policies and writing about them.

In colonial context, most of the landscape studies have focused on the arable parts of the landscape. The growing domain of environmental history has attempted to document 'agrarian environment' and its relation with the 'indigenous people' in colonial context. The present research deviates from this academic tradition and seeks to concentrate on the non-arable areas. In this context, this paper aims to focus on the Adivasi[1] perception of landscape in the context of the non-arable parts of Manbhum[2] district which was the abode of both the Adivasi agriculturists (Mundas, Oraons, Kurmis and Santals) and forest dwellers (Kherias and Birhors). The term 'landscape' is a complex concept. It can be seen as 'a socio-historical construct', as Denis Cosgrove, the geographer, argues. Cosgrove

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[1] The word 'Adivasi' means original inhabitant. For details, see an excellent study (Rycroft 2014) on assertion of Adivasis as indigenous peoples in India. Recently scholars (Rycroft 2014:1) do not italicize the word in order to normalize its use.

[2] Present Purulia district (West Bengal, India) is a part of erstwhile Manbhum district. The district was bordered on the north by Hazaribagh and Santhal Parganas, on the east by Burdwan, Bankura and Midnapur, on the south by Singhbhum and on the west by Ranchi and Hazaribagh. This Bengal district was formed in 1833 but it was part of Bihar and Orissa during the period of 1912-1956.

and Stephen Daniels introduced the concept of visual metaphors or ways of seeing. Thus, it is a way of seeing projected into the land which has its own techniques and which articulates a particular way of constructing a relationship with nature (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988). In a similar approach, Vinita Damodaran considers landscape as 'a complex symbolic terrain for definition of Chotanagpuri identity'. She also mentions that this territorial identity was expressed by the Adivasis through stories and legends of its reclamation and reconstitution by them in better times to underline an intimate living relationship with its inhabitants. Their engagement with the forest formed a human landscape in different ways (Damodaran 2002: 87-91).

The district of Manbhum is the first step of the gradual descent from the elevated plateau of Chotanagpur proper to the plains of lower Bengal and also a part of the Ranchi pane-plain. The hills and valleys made up most part of the district (Coupland 1911:12). The natural vegetation of immediately pre-colonial and early colonial Manbhum was essentially arboreal. Actually, it was a part of the Jungle Mahals,[3] a land of moist tropical deciduous forests characterized by tall trees rising up to 40 meters to form the top canopy, a lower second storey of many species with some evergreens, then a mantle of shrubs entangled by a network of climbers (Bhattacharyay1985: 19). Valentine Ball's account informs that the environment was capable of sustaining many plants and animals. Moist deciduous forest of pre-colonial Manbhum supported a wide variety of herbivores and carnivores (Ball 1868: 58, 114-24). In this type of ecosystem, Soil-Plant-Atmosphere Continuum (SPAC) naturally exists[4] where water moves from soil through plant to atmosphere. From terrestrial plane, aquatic domain and soil system, water then enters into the pool of vegetation. The plants transpire it into the atmosphere and water also evaporates from soil. The processes of transpiration and evaporation are collectively considered as an evapo-transpiration. Different climatological parameters of the atmosphere are regulated by the water. The micro-environment of soil is completely regulated by the vegetal type, its floristic component and canopy coverage. It creates ecological loci or niches of different soil arthropods (act as the key stone community in the soil ecosystem), annelids, nematodes, bacteria, different cryptogrammic plants, root system of higher plants and mycorrhiza (a type of fungi). Soil erosion, soil pH (acid-based property of soil), water holding capacity, soil texture etc., are controlled by the vegetation.

In this environment, the Adivasis of Manbhum developed their resource management skills. Reconstruction of environmental histories of villages will allow us to piece together the rich and complex stories about the relationship between people and nature. Every Adivasi society was/is governed by its own social organization and institutions. These institutions, linked to biological resource management, were governed by religious myth and socio-cultural belief system (Ramakrishnan 2001:114). Sometimes, it is assumed that during early ages the forest and the landscape were untouched and un-manipulated, and so the forests remained pristine. The Adivasi life, at that time, was

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[3] It was formed in 1805. For details of its concept and administrative geography see (Sen 2013:18-23).

[4] Duncun D Smith's lecturer on 'Water Movement through the Soil-Plant Continuum', http://www.plantecology.net/uploads.pdf accessed on 04.05.2015.

intermingled with the Nature (Roy 1912:58).[5] This stereotype is however contested by recent scholarship (Damodaran: 2006: 53).[6] Challenging ecological romanticism, Shepard Krech comments 'Many native peoples themselves draw on a tradition of texts promulgating noble imagery that has generally had deeper roots in European self-criticism than in indigenous realities' (Krech 2000: 216) . However, the truth is even more complicated than it appears. The Adivasis of Manbhum settled villages in the forests after clearing a forest patch adjacent to nearby water resource. Sometimes, they created some artificial water resource also within their village landscape (Roy 1915: 131; Bodding 1984:100-101).[7] Thus, they did change and manipulate their surrounding landscape. However, because of low population pressure and less per capita consumption, they did not generally cause large-scale ecological damage. The rate at which they exploited their surrounding resource at local scale, could keep pace with the regeneration and restoration rate of natural and ecological process. Furthermore, each and every such local societies followed some rules and regulation which may be classified into three categories i) rules created by their ignorance, believe and faith, ii) rules created on the basis of experience of senior persons and iii) religious rules invented by the village headman and priest (*layas*). These three categories may further be divided into two types, *i.e.* a) those detrimental to nature, b) nature-friendly rules. While the second category of rules helped nature to rejuvenate due to low population pressure, the first could not cause much ecological imbalance (Bodding 1993: 161).[8]

Method of site selection for a new village (*hatu/ ato*)

The Munda Adivasis founded villages which were known as *khuntkatti hatu*. *Khuntkattidars* or the original settlers of villages[9] enjoyed privileged status in the village. On the death of the founder of the village his eldest son generally became the headman and inherited his father's functions (Mahto 1989: 63). Everything within such village was common property of the members of the village family or Khuntkattidars.[10] The idea of the ownership of land of the Mundas was 'the archaic one of joint ownership by the family or by a group of agnatic families' (Roy 1912: 60-62).

In order to understand the landscape management of the district, we should understand how a village was founded. The process began when some of them under a leader explored a suitable site within the forest. In site selection, suitability depended on whether *sal*{*Shorea robusta* Gaertn. f. (Dipterocar pacea)}, *mahua* {*Madhuca indica*, Gmelin (Combretaceae)} and other trees, crystal clear water, cultivable land and irrigation facility were available or not. Another criterion was to ascertain whether the

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[5] (Roy1912:58) describes the jungles of Chotanagpur as 'the primeval forests abounding in live game and edible roots and fruits'.

[6] (Damodaran 2006:53) argues that 'representation of a remote wooded landscape' is not borne out by fact.

[7] (Bodding 1984) The first version of this Santali text was published in 1887 by L.O. Skrefsrud and translated with notes and additions by P.O. Bodding in1942.

[8] *lo bir sendra* (hunting festival) is harmful to nature.

[9] For a detail account of khuntkatti, see (Roy 1912: 60-62).

[10] Circle Note of Attestation Camp No. II, Barabhum, Session -1904-1910 by Mr. Radhakanta Ghosh, Assistant Settlement Officer. P-60. Manbhum District Records (hereafter MDR).

balance between supernatural entities (good and evil spirits) [11] existed (Mahapatra 1993: 31). To determine the presence of good spirits at the selected place for village settlement one interesting test was conducted with the cock and charmed rice (Bodding 1984*:* 100-101).[12] Then, the Adivasi community cleared the jungle for the homestead fields, using the trees they had cut down for building houses while burning away the remaining timber etc. Running along the middle of the place they had chosen for the village, they kept a village street, and at the end of this they arranged a sacred grove (Bodding 1984: 16). From a Santal song, we find a clear idea of this pattern: *Okoe mae ciyalet' ho bir disam do? / Okoe mae doholet' ho atore paeri? Maranburu ciyalet' ho birdisom do. / Jaher erae doho let' ho atore paeri* (Bhowmik 2005: 17)*.* [Who had searched a deep jungle for the first time? / Who had kept crystal clear water in the village? / *Maran Buru* had searched a deep jungle. / *Jaher Era* had kept crystal clear water in the village.].

Village became their permanent habitat which they left more or less on two occasions. If an epidemic came causing the death of men and cattle, the villagers deserted the entire village and migrated to a new place to avoid misery. There was a general belief in most Adivasi societies that unmixed good or unmixed evil was not desirable either for an individual or for the community. They believed that when this balance was broken in an individual's life, there was disease and ill health, followed inexorably by death. Similarly, there was quarrel, disharmony among families and groups in the villages, and epidemics and calamities befell on the whole community when the balance was upset in society (Mahato 1995: 16). The next occasion occurred when due to rise in population; people had to shift to a new place in search of a fresh site.

Soil classification and preparation of Agricultural fields

The soil of Manbhum is mostly covered with laterite and red soil, which is mainly composed of sandy clay, hard, dry, ferruginous gravel, which has been furrowed into countless small channels by the discharge of surface drainage. However, underneath these unfriendly textures lies a rich store of good alluvial soil. The lower slopes of these uplands are used as wet rice crop field. When the hillsides were terraced for cultivation, it appears like a series of steps varying from one to five feet in height. A long narrow rice field was made when beds of streams were shored up at intervals (Gokhale 1928: 37).

In order to prepare agricultural fields, the agriculturalist Adivasis classified the undulating land and also the soil. There are three categories of rice land. First type i.e., *Bahal* is the lowest. This type mostly benefits by percolation from a *bandh* (pond) which possesses the most retentive moisture. Thereafter comes *kanali*, and at the topmost, lies *baid.* There is yet another type which is known as *danga* or *tanr*. It is called *gora* when it is used for cultivation (Coupland 1911: 19*)*. The first class of *sol* or *hir (*equivalent to bahal*)* land lies in the depression between the ridges. It is good for rice cultivation as it is composed of rich alluvial soil. A narrow strip of second class low land is found in large

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[11] The Adivasis belived that there were different types of *bhuts* or spirits such as household bhut, sept bhuts, village bhuts, village *devtas*, wandering bhuts, common devtas. They considered earth both as a devta and as a bhut. The village priest deals with both the deities and spirits of the village landscape whilst the Ojha deals with all the mischievous spirits who are responsible for all kinds of sickness and some spirits who have been disregarded by people.
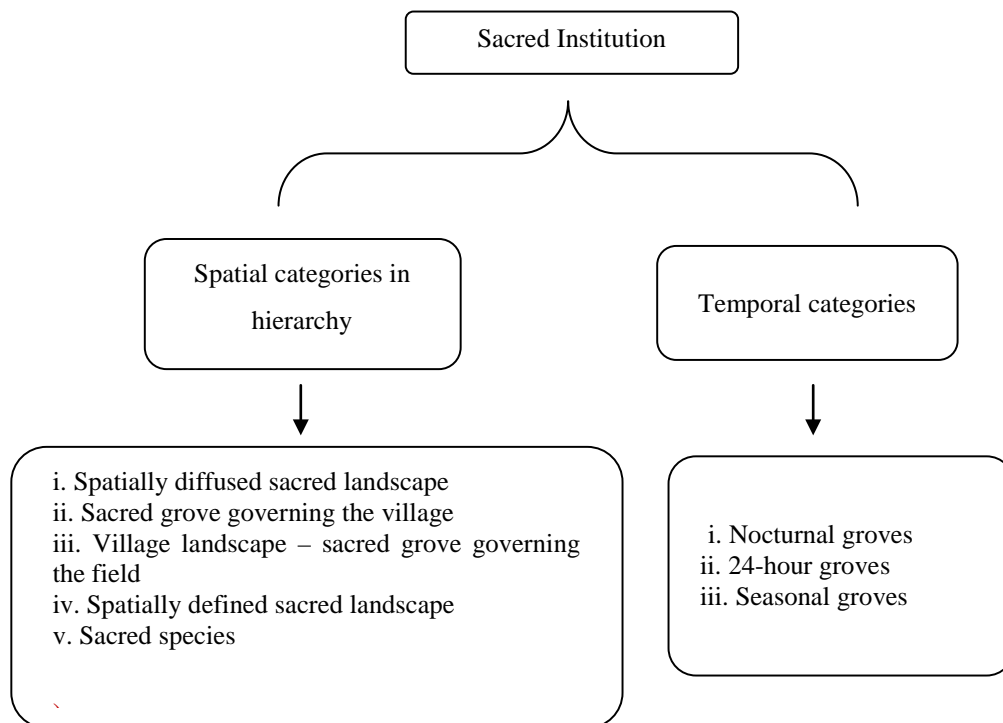
[12] Similar story was collected by the author from Sri Deben Soren, Dulalgora, Neturi, October 10, 2007.

stretches of terraced land often between baid and gora lands on either side of the stretch. These are a few fields of second class low land found at the higher end of gora land (Gokhale1928: 37).

Classification of land is also important for the construction of a bandh for irrigating agricultural lands. Thus, realizing the topographical position, soil texture and keenly observing the very capricious distribution of rainfall, Adivasi cultivators of Manbhum managed as well as utilized water. They made different types of bandhs to meet different purposes. Accordingly, these were classified into irrigation ponds, bathing ponds for human beings, cattle-bathing ponds and ponds for drinking water and religious ponds, etc.[13] For example, the drinking water and religious ponds were given special honour and were regarded as divine mother by the Adivasis.

Investing sacredness with landscape

After the establishment of a new village it was deemed necessary to set up different sacred institutions. We notice that these institutions maintained a broader social hierarchy. These were classified into two overlapping main categories, spatial and temporal. The spatial categories may be classified into five hierarchical categories and temporal into three categories.

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                        ┌─────────────────────┐
                        │ Sacred Institution  │
                        └─────────────────────┘
              ┌──────────────────┴──────────────────┐
     ┌──────────────────┐                  ┌──────────────────┐
     │ Spatial categories│                  │ Temporal         │
     │ in hierarchy      │                  │ categories       │
     └──────────────────┘                  └──────────────────┘
              │                                      │
     ┌──────────────────────────────┐    ┌──────────────────────────┐
     │ i. Spatially diffused sacred │    │  i. Nocturnal groves     │
     │ landscape                    │    │ ii. 24-hour groves       │
     │ ii. Sacred grove governing   │    │ iii. Seasonal groves     │
     │ the village                  │    │                          │
     │ iii. Village landscape –     │    └──────────────────────────┘
     │ sacred grove governing       │
     │ the field                    │
     │ iv. Spatially defined sacred │
     │ landscape                    │
     │ v. Sacred species            │
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[13] Oral history collected from Sri Sristidhar Mahato, Village & Post-Jambaid, Purulia District, W.B.November 11, 2004.

Madhav Gadgil and V. D. Vartak have discussed the sacred groves of Western Ghats of India. They write, 'India still preserves many patches of forest which have been immune from human interference for centuries on grounds of religious beliefs. The nature of the cults associated with these 'sacred groves' indicates that they date from the hunting-gathering stage of the society, which lasted till circa 600 A.D. on the Western Ghats' (Gadgil and Vartak 1976: 160). P. S. Ramakrishnan observes spatial dimension and specificities of sacred institutions and conceptualizes a broader hierarchy of social institutions or sacred entities. Following the Ramakrishnan model, the present paper intends to study the spatial categories of sacred institutions in Manbhum. This study also looks at temporal categories of sacred institution which have not been discussed in earlier works.

Spatial Categories

i) Spatially diffused sacred landscape, the first category, belonged to the top most layer. It had the greatest zone of influence because it governed a large scale but had least specificity. According to P.S. Ramakrishnan, least specificity denotes lower number of prescription and prohibition in terms of practiced cultural norms (Ramakrishnan 2001: 114). In this category, there was a set of interacting ecosystem. Here a human being may be viewed as an integral component of the eco-system landscape function. The identification of the zone of influence is the guiding principles in demarcating the boundary for this type of sacred landscape. It influenced not only the village people but also vast majority of people in the whole region. The Damodar River is an appropriate example of this category. As it governed the social and religious life of the people of vast region, it came to pervade its entire eco-system. Among the Santals, the river was regarded as sacred where they consigned the ashes of their dead as an important mortuary ritual. This ritual was known as *Damodar Yatra*. Telkupi, a holy place is situated in the south bank of the Damodar River in Pargana Cheliama. Here, on the last days of *chaitra* (last month of Bengali calendar), *Baruni Mela* (a local festival) was organized by the Santals (Coupland 1911: 289). *Babir bandh* (Kashipur Police Station, Purulia District, West Bengal) is an example of this type of landscape. Here, the Adivasis performed a ritual named *magra sinan*[14] (Murmu 2002: 232-33). Babir bandh represents an ecosystem which has vastness and boundaries. As such, it becomes a diffused sacred landscape. This ecosystem has been transformed into a social entity and assigned symbolic meaning.

ii) The sacred grove governing the village, the second category in this hierarchy, had greater zone of influence because it governed the whole village. The religious belief system of the Adivasis of this region, as elsewhere, was closely associated with nature. They believed that the forests, hills and rivers were the abode of their gods and spirits. This invested sacredness to the nature. Every Adivasi village was governed by a sacred grove (*Sarna /Garam than*) which was a part of the primordial forest. According to P.S. Ramakrishnan, 'sacred groves are defined as small patches of native vegetation that are protected by traditional communities on the basis of cultural /religious beliefs' (Ramakrishnan 2001: 116). In Manbhum, every Adivasi village had the sacred grove

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[14] Children whose teeth rise in an even numbered month (*jora mas*) were given *magra sinan* to keep away from evil spirits.

being governed by the village council. Their deities were usually in the form of unshaped stone lumps, pieces of wood, abnormal trees, water bodies etc. Individuals were therefore expected to pay respect to the sacred grove. People believed that violation of the rules and regulations related to the sacred groves would cause serious illness. At the Sarna, villagers could not tell a lie. So for confession a thief or a person committing a wrong or violating the social norms was brought before the Sarna. It was not only a place of worship and performance but it also served other socio-cultural and religious purposes. Adivasis would not do anything in the field, such as construction of pond, without worshiping the God of the sacred grove (Mahato 2002: 93).

iii) The third category of this hierarchy was the sacred grove governing the field. This type of sacred grove was located in a place of a specific crop field such as baid, bahal, tarn (upland) or kanali. As they did not interfere with the sacred grove different species were protected in the grove. Before sowing of crop, the Adivasis first made offerings to the god/goddesses residing in the field. Moreover, they did not reap their harvest before dedicating their offering to the god/goddess.[15] Thus for the entire period of cultivation the agrarian work itself became sacred.

iv) The fourth category of this hierarchy was the sacred ponds, springs and mountains. Each spatially defined landscape had well defined institutional norms. In this landscape, soil, air and water were all sacred to the Adivasis and any disturbance in it was strictly restricted due to existing myth.[16]

A Sacred Pond with her deity, Village- Nadiha, P.S.-Hura, Dist- Purulia,W.B

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[15] From W. Dent, Jt. Commissioner of Chotanagpur and Jungle Mahals, To, Macsween Esqr. Sec to Govt., Fort William, 4th September,1833, para-4. Dent described a sacred grove of the Bhumijs.MDR.

[16] There were *barkana duba* ponds where bride and bridegroom were drowned to death as they polluted a sacred pond on their way to bridegroom's home after marriage. Adivasis were careful about these types of ponds and this type of myth kept them away from pollution.

In every Adivasi village, especially among agriculturalists, there were one or two separately maintained drinking and religious ponds.[17] These were sanctified as divine mother by the Adivasi people. Likewise, some ponds were abandoned for various reasons (i.e., natural biological pollution or toxification of water). People believed that the ponds had become the abode of ghosts. The concept of ghost (evil spirits *bhut gorean*) is some kind of superstition linking the devils and ghosts to pollution of toxin detrimental to life. It is important to note that the non-agriculturalist Adivasis (Kherias and Birhors) did not dig ponds. They instead used springs and ascribed sacredness on them. Sacred grove of Kherias and Birhors remained in the mountain. It was functioned as a source to generate the resource. Their regular hunting fields received the supply of animals from these sacred regions. The day when the forest Dwellers would fail in the hunting they could hunt animals or collect fruits from their sacred hills. In order to collect food from the sacred place they had pray their deity.[18]

v) The last category of this hierarchical organization is the concept of the sacredness of some species. Ramakrishnan rightly observes that this evolved with a mixture of conscious and unconscious decisions for their latent value. He also points out that socially and culturally valued species are often also ecologically significant keystone species (Ramakrishnan 2001: 117). The banyan tree (*Ficus bengalensis*) is an appropriate example. It produces fruits several times in a year. Different species of banyan tree produce fruits in different times. Due to constant supply of foods different animals depend on its fruits. The number of predators of fruit-eaters is depended on the number of fruit-eaters. Banyan tree, therefore, were and are worshiped as a sacred object by many Adivasis. Totem species of the Adivasis were also regarded as sacred species. So they imposed some restrictions to prevent any harm being inflicted on them.

Temporal categories

Adivasi village was both a social and cultural construct. In their perception nature became a cultural space as it influenced their all aspects of life. According to the Adivasi belief, the entire ecosystem was regarded as a nocturnal sacred grove. They further believed that as the entire flora and fauna slept during night, so people should not disturb them. However, certain species were considered as sacred throughout the day. According to the Adivasi belief, the entire ecosystem was regarded as a nocturnal sacred grove (first category). They further believed that all the flora and fauna sleep during night, so people should not disturb them. However, certain species were considered as sacred throughout the day (second category). The third temporal category, the seasonal grove is similar to the third hierarchical category (Village landscape – sacred grove governing the field) of the spatial categories. Kurmi, Bhumij and Munda rested their *tangies* (a tool to cut the branches of tree) on the advent of spring. This ritual is known as *Tangi-Tanga*. They kept away from cutting and injuring tender branches and twigs during the period from onset of spring to the *Sahrul* or *Baha parab* (flowering festival). This is a kind of seasonal

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[17] Oral history collected from Sri Sristidhar Mahato, Village& Post-Jambaid, Purulia District, W. B. Interview: November 11, 2004.

[18] Oral history collected from Sri Kalipada Savar, an Savar old man of Sidhatar village, Post- Kuda, Purulia District, W.B. Interview: September, 09, 2006.

observance where the trees in groves were regarded as sacred and their living entity manifested in branches and twigs (Mahato 2007: 11).

Colonial Intervention

The discourse of scientific forestry was totally different from the Adivasi perception of landscape. This has been considered as 'a mechanistic science where nature, the human body, and animals could be described, repaired and control – as could the parts of a machine, by separate human mind acting according to rational laws'(Damodaran 2005: 118). The debate of scientific forestry was embedded within the scientific world view which is described by Carolyn Merchant as the 'world as dead and inert, manipulability from outside and exploitable for profit … living animate nature died … increasingly capital and the market assumed the organic attributes of growth … nature, women and wage labourers were set on a path as human resources for the modern world system.' She observed that the mechanistic worldview is a product of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century (Merchant 1992: 41-60). In view of this domination over nature it was inherent in the market economy's use of the both as resources. This domination became a natural trend in colonial Chotanagpur. In the interest of production and profit, the colonial rulers sought to dominate forest, mineral and water resources. That is why, on the one hand, there occurred large-scale deforestation in order to expand agricultural land, and on the other, forests were protected to promote other interests of colonial rulers. Thus the scientific forestry has recently been described as a 'masculine discourse' (Damodaran 2002.b: 142-44). This process of domination dangerously threatened the life pattern of the Adivasis and as a result dreadful ecological hazards appeared.

Paul Sutter has made an observation on the South Asian forest historiography. According to him it 'has been concentrated more on the social consequences than the ecological consequences (to the extent that they can be separated) of that change' (Sutter 2003: 4). Similarly, Mahesh Rangarajan has pointed out that 'one crucial aspect of historical change often neglected, is the ecological part of the story: when, why and how particular human intervention led to major transformation in the natural world' (Rangarajan 1996: 8).

Furthermore, the colonial rulers considered the land and natural resources as state property as it primarily satisfied their revenue needs. However, colonial environmental agendas were often marked by internal conflicts because there were no clear cut policies. In order to maintain ecological balance and continuous supply of timber, conservation measures were taken after the 1860s. But due to Adivasi revolts the colonial environmental policies could not remain uniform. Moreover, both the colonial government and the Adivasis sought to follow a shared environmental ideology (Sen 2011: 208).

From the late 18th century onwards, colonial intervention initiated a process of transformation in Manbhum, which led to major ecological degradation. Due to the growing demand of the railway system, which required immense quantities of logs of sal (Shorea robusta Gaertn. f. [Dipterocar pacea]) to make sleepers for the railway, pressure was placed on the forest of Jungle Mahals (Profenburger 1999: 135). The opening of the main line of the Bengal Nagpur Railway through Kharagpur and Jhargram (1898) had a

profound impact on the forests of the region. Deforestation was carried out by two groups of peoples: a) the *zamindar* (landowner) by recruiting indigenous people on different forms of contract, notably *nayabadi* (new tillage) and *junglebary* (land tenure)[19] and b) the colonial rulers by employing European companies, such as the Midnapur Zamindari Company, to collect wood. From 1883 onward, the Midnapur Zamindari Company took on a lease of forest land from the zamindars and sold the timber for shipbuilding and the production of railway sleepers.[20]

During the latter part of the 18th and throughout the 19th century, the first priority of the colonial government was the expansion of agriculture and encouragement of cultivation. In a letter dated 17 January 1768, Edward Baber addressed John Shore as follows: 'There is very little land cultivated in the whole extent and a disproportionate part of it capable of cultivation; the soil is very rocky, the country mountainous and overspread with thick woods which render it in many places impassable' (Samaddar 1998: 46). In the 1880s, W.W. Hunter noted that a large portion of the waste land was cultivable and was being cleared continually to be cultivated under three types of tenures: nayabadi, *ahrat* (embankment), and *jalsasan* or water supply (Hunter1887: 320-21). The land revenue policy of the British was to colonise land aggressively for agriculture and commodity production [21] 'at the expense of forest tracts and to exterminate all wild and dangerous game' (Damodaran 2005: 118). H. Coupland mentions the practice of paying of 'rewards… for the destruction of three tigers and seventy-nine leopards' (Coupland 1911: 2).

In pursuance of the above objectives, the British rulers embarked on the policy of promoting private land ownership and commercialization of forests. The Tenancy Act of 1885 and Rent Act of 1859 attempted to transform the established agrarian structure. The Tenancy Act clarified the tenure holder's right who had got it from another tenure holder or proprietor. Secondly, they adopted the policy of encouraging artificial irrigation. The colonial rulers used existing bandhs and encouraged the digging of new ones to increase the area under irrigation.[22] To quote a recent study: 'In many areas the natural limits of arable expansion had been reached, especially the more open parts of southern and eastern Manbhum and in the Jharia coalfields'.[23] The opening of coal mines, in particular, brought agricultural expansion to an 'abrupt end'. The demand for land increased with growing population pressure. Restrictions were imposed on customary concessions. Junglebary leases replaced nayabadi ones (Mahapartra 1991: 24).

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[19] A junglebari tenure was a lease of a specific area of land at a fixed rent. This lease was given to a tenant in consideration of the grantee clearing jungle and bringing the land into a productive state. For jungleburi, see (Hunter1887: 332).

[20] Circle Note of Attestation Camp No. II, Barabhum, Session -1904-1910 by Mr. Radhakanta Ghosh, Assistant Settlement Officer, p. 51. MDR.

[21] See (Thirumali 2006: 249). Thirumali has shown in his article that 'through the agricultural conquest and cultural superimpositions during colonial period the Adivasi hamlets were attached with the revenue villages'.

[22] (Pati 2006: 175-176) has rightly pointed out that 'some of the complexities related to the agrarian intervention, the production process and the social stratification that emerged are not discussed for constraints of spaces'.

[23] (Mahapartra 1991: 22) in his fine grown study has shown the interrelationship between class structure, class conflict and rate of surplus extraction in Chotanagpur division during colonial period.

The 'agrarian invasion' brought a dramatic change in the land-use pattern (Richard 1985: 5-6). Cultivation was extended even to remote, hilly and wild areas like Tundi, Baghmundi and Matha. Writing in 1911, Coupland comments on 'the extent to which the area brought under cultivation has increased during the last 20 years'(Coupland1911: 120). From 1884 to 1904, the area terraced for rice increased by 80% in Tundi, by 15% in Matha, and by 43% in Kuilapal. Tundi is a hilly area in the extreme north, while Matha lies to the west of the Bagmundi range. Kuilapal was the 'wilder' portion of the district. In 1911, Coupland described 'the extension of cultivation in the district as a whole during the last twenty five years as approximating to 20 or 25 per cent,' and noted that 'the destruction of jungle in order to bring land under cultivation areas which are unlikely to remain cultivable more than a few years at the outside is common almost everywhere that any jungle remains' (Coupland1911: 120).
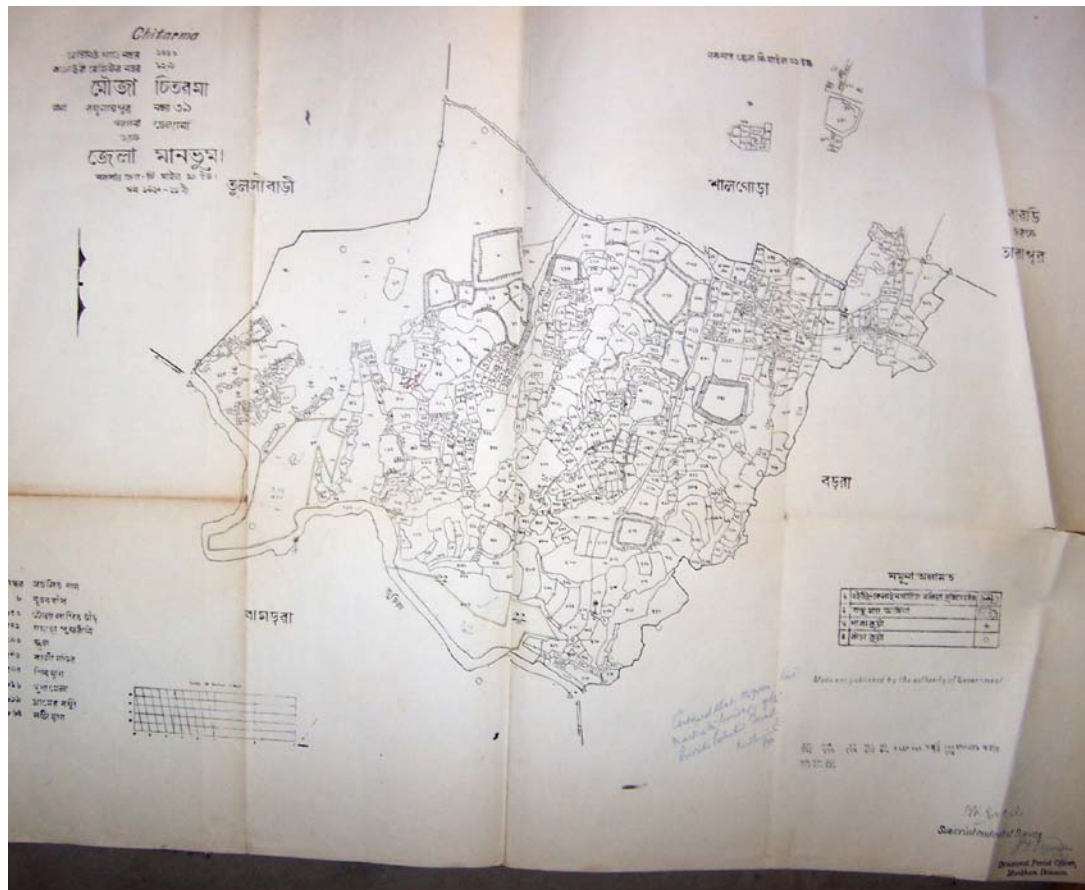
Map 1. Mouza Map of a Village, Manbhum District, photograph taken by the author

The colonial authorities parcelled out the Adivasi landscape (Damodaran 2002: 87-91; Sivaramakrishnan1999: 80). Survey and settlement operations were conducted, new

'villages' being created in the process.[24] In the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, 'village' designated 'any local area in which a survey has been made and record of rights prepared under any enactment for the time being in force, the area included within the same exterior boundary in the village map finally adopted in making such survey and record, as subsequently modified by the decision (if any) of a court of competent jurisdiction'.[25] In 1920, the village was further defined as 'the area which for the purposes of such survey and record-of-rights may be adopted by the Revenue officer subject to the control of the Commissioner as the unit of survey and records'.[26] The colonial authorities were striving to create villages as revenue units (Map 1). As Ranabir Samaddar writes, 'the whole process of defining a village, denoting boundaries of jungles, clarifying various types of settlement, locating various types of land and classifying them, became ridden with tension'. Village was created and again recreated as a revenue unit. Here there was no space for social solidarity[27] of the Adivasis.

In order to create a village it was necessary for the settlement officials to demarcate exact location between villages or forests. They also demarcated the actual location of grazing land. When a village was recreated, land, water body and trees were also transferred from one village boundary to another village boundary. Due to arrear of rent, villages were sold and thus village after villages were broken down (Samaddar 1998: 73-90). Therefore, colonial creation of a village was a well defined space and inhabitants were also counted and administered. The resources of villages were appropriated through the apparatus of colonial state. Here the village became a lowest administrative unit of the British Raj (Sen 2008: 7).

The British agrarian intervention fostered 'landlordism in rural Chotanagpur' by legitimating the Adivasi chiefs as landowners (zamindars) (Damodaran 1998: 864). But at the same time, colonial authority was gradually superimposed on the feudal authority of the Rajas when they were subjected to a new taxation system (including rent to be paid in cash, excise and other levies) (Damodaran 1998: 864). While chiefs or Rajas of Manbhum were transformed into zamindars, sub-infeudation occurred and new intermediaries 'emerged from among the holders of jungle clearing tenures in the nineteenth century' (Mahapartra 1991: 22). Thus, the British agrarian invasion led to the spread of different kinds of land tenure and formed horizontal stratification.[28] The expansion of stratification and consequent increase in gross rental created extra pressure of zamindars on tenants. As a result, it increased legal disputes and tension in rural society. With introduction of hierarchical property structure in villages the headmanship in villages were broken down. These also adversely affected community ownership of resources like land, forest and water and their intimate relationship with nature.

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[24] Circle Note of Attestation Camp No. II, Barabhum, Session -1904-1910 by Mr. Radhakanta Ghosh, Assistant Settlement Officer, pp.45-46. MDR.

[25] The Chotanagpur Tenancy Act 1908, Chapter-I, Section-III, p. 6, 1952, Patna: Superintendent Government Printing.

[26] Ins. By s. 4 (1) of the The Chotanagpur Tenancy Act(Amd.), 1920(B. O. Act 6 of 1920).

[27] Adivasi people had their common property as they collectively used land, water and forests. In their society headman played an important role.

[28] Circle Note of Attestation Camp, Manbazar, Session-1920-21, p. 55. MDR.

With the transformation of villages from solidarities to settlement units in Manbhum, a decline of the *mandal* or *pradhan*[29] as an institution occurred. Mandal became an ordinary *raiyat* and his rights became also transferable (Samaddar 1998: 89-94). Private property was created by transforming the former tribute paying structure into rental property (Mahapatra 1991: 11). *Mukarari*[30] leases were increased through the middlemen. After gaining a foothold in the region, the moneylenders got both the Rajas and the tenants into their clutches. As Suchibrata Sen informs: 'The *mandals* were forced to sell to Bengali *mahajans* who stepped into their places. In both cases, the result was the break-up of the *mandali* system'.[31]

In the wake of the agrarian invasion and forest destruction, came environmental deterioration. In 1855, Henry Ricketts reported the total absence of trees in Purulia town.[32] In 1863, Major J. Sherwill and Captain Donald Mcdonald described the landscape as 'hilly, stony and broken', and added: 'The soil is poor.'[33] In 1867, 49.05% of the district was under cultivation. By 1908-1909, the area under cultivation had increased to 59%, fallow land and cultivable wasteland was 7%, and the remaining 34% consisted of land not available for cultivation (Mahato 2010).

The impact of official policy was visible over the water bodies like rivers and ponds. Deforestation caused huge amounts of soil erosion by rainwater and the subsequent deposition on the bed of the river, reducing its depth (Coupland 1911: 5). The shallowness of the river increased the turbidity of its waters, making them contaminated. This, in turn, affected the health of the hunting and gathering Adivasis, in particular the Savars and Birhors.[34] The colonial masters tended to see the bandhs merely as water bodies and thus divested these of the holiness ascribed to them by the Adivasis. The Advasis not only ascribed different ecological and economic qualities to the ponds but also personified them. The colonial rulers employed them for irrigation, taking no account of the land-water-vegetation relationship. The clearing of vegetation surrounding a pond and /or upstream of it accelerated soil erosion. The resulting siltation of the pond started a chain of ecological degradation such as a decrease in water volume, an increase in nutrient concentration, an increase in the productivity of pond ecosystem, and, ultimately decreasing oxygen levels in the water. This led to a decrease in green plants and their replacement by blue-green algae, which generated toxins and foul smell, causing death of the water fauna; a dreadful process known as 'eutrophication'.

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[29] Mandals were pillars of Jungle Mahals as their functions were to help in reclamation, extension of agriculture and village affairs etc.

[30] The term mokarari indicates a permanent tenure on fixed rent. These tenures were created invariably on receipt of some *pan* (considerable money). Thus the tenures were sometimes described as *pan baha* mukarari.

[31] For the breakdown of mandali systems see (Sen 1989: 63).

[32] Henry Ricketts, 'Reports on the Agency Administration', in *Selection from the Records of Bengal Government*, vol.-XX, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta1855,pp. 2-3

[33] Note of the Map of Pargana Pandra, Sherghor, Mahesrah & Chatna, Main Circuit No. 5 & 9, 1862-63. The survey was conducted by Major J L Sherwill and Captain Donald Mcdonald.

[34] Oral history collected from Sri Kalipada Savar, Savar old man, Vill-Sidhatarn, Dist.-Purulia, 27th March 2003.

Agrarian intervention and creation of colonial forestry had a catastrophic impact on the forest Dwelling Adivasis like Birhors and Kherias. With the destruction of forest ecosystem, the traditional food items of the hunters and food gatherers got reduced. There is a story narrating how their sacred hill lost its sacredness: the forefather of the Adivasis used to place an empty winning fan in the morning in front of the doorstep of a cave on a hill. With the grace of their deities, they used to collect the winning fan, full of food staff in the evening. But one day they reluctantly found not only the door of the cave closed but also the winnowing fan empty.[35] Thus, the locality was out of the holly touch of the deities.

Conclusion

The Adivasi communities managed their village landscape with their own indigenous knowledge system during pre-colonial and early colonial period. Possessing the ability to generate resources, the agriculturist Adivasis had modified nature and also actively maintained it in a diverse and productive state based on their indigenous knowledge, socio-cultural practices and religious beliefs. Likewise, forest dwellers also had skills to manage and reproduce natural/biological resources through various means. It was not seasonal but took long years unlike agriculturists. Adivasi community life was constructed through symbolization, represented by their sacred institutions and myths. This reminds us of Anthony Cohen's 'symbolic construction of community'. There was social solidarity in an Adivasi village where land, forest and pond were not transferable commodities and had common access. But the scenario has been changed during the colonial period. The British aggressively colonized land for the expansion of commodity production through the agricultural conquests, trade and commerce and later on through mining. Colonial administration partitioned Adivasi landscape and converted a village merely into a revenue unit. They delineated boundaries of jungles, clarifying various types of settlement, locating various types of land and also classifying them. Colonial creation of villages disrupted the social solidarity of the Adivasis. Neither the post colonial policy makers nor the academician or influential persons still take the Adivasi ideas of landscape seriously.

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[35] Oral history collected from Sri Kalipada Savar.

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ARTICLE IN NEWSPAPER:

Mitchell, Alison and Frank Bruni. 2006. 'Scars Still Raw, Bush Clashes with McCain'. *New York Times*, 25 March.

ONLINE ARTICLE IN NEWSPAPER:

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