

## 2 Meanings of self and landscape and dynamics of self-fashioning

It is now time to turn to Western and Southern India, *and to the local traditions of non-Aryan races in India generally.*

(Baden-Powell 1972: 92)

The second part, forming the core of this study, is about the fructification of Adivasi selfhood around landscape. I argue that landscape – jal, jungle and jameen – plays a constitutive and defining role in the formation and growth of Adivasihood. Set over a long time frame, this study helps form an understanding of the origin of indigenous selfhood and its invention during feudal, colonial and the lived present. In different chapters, this part unfolds the story of how ethnic boundaries were formed and how in the course of time trans-ethnic, pan-Indian and global indigenous mobilisation surfaced, not however failing to avoid the fractures within their own ranks. Assertion of identity or selfhood was coeval with the reinvention of the landscape. The introductory chapter will seek to comprehend the very meaning of self and landscape, function of the dynamics of self-fashioning and the boundary that delineates Adivasi identity in the contemporary period.

### Meanings of self and landscape

Self and the related term identity have engaged the attention particularly of anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists and political scientists since the second half of the 20th century (Leary and Tangney 2012: 70; Callero 2003: 115; Cerulo 1997: 385; Mead 1934: 136–7). This scholarly intervention has been impacted by the advent of post-structuralism, cultural studies, feminism and globalisation (Callero 2003: 116). A more engaging and relevant fact for this study is the spurt in identity assertion among indigenous communities. It becomes

topical, therefore, to comprehend what is meant by self and in what way the terms self and identity are intertwined. According to the *New Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, self means 'the type of person you are, especially the way you normally behave, look or feel' and a person's personality or character that distinguishes him/her from other people (Hornby 2005: 1376). On the other hand, identity implies 'who or what somebody/something is' and 'the characteristics, feelings or beliefs that distinguish people from others'. This definition needs to be examined in the context of conceptualisation of these notions by different scholars.

The conceptualisation of self is marked by interconnected attempts at, what Callero underlines as 'discovery' and 'deconstruction' (2003: 118). Discovery involves exploration of self, both at individual and collective/social levels. Basically, self is the notion of individual self, where 'I' as subject seeks to know the object, that is, 'me' (Leary and Tangney 2012: 72–3). But we are concerned more with the collectivistic 'us' self and not 'individualistic "me" self', a contrast underlined by social psychologists and sociologists (*ibid.*: 74; Cerulo 1997: 385). The collective, social self, fructifies when 'aggregates of people who essentially share a common culture, and interconnected differences' underline their distinction from all others (Barth 1966: 9). This constitutes 'the knowledge that one is a member of a group, one's feelings about group membership, and knowledge of the group's rank or status compared to other groups' (Leary and Tangney 2012: 74). The mental construct or the knowledge and belief about self constitutes – self-concept, out of which the notion of identity is formed (*ibid.*: 69). Therefore, 'self, self-concept, and identity can be considered as nested elements', the reason why scholars very often deploy self and identity as synonyms (*ibid.*: 71, 74).

The idea of self as 'I', missing at birth, develops progressively through social experiences and activities and interaction with other individuals (Mead 1934: Self 134). Likewise, the collective self and identity are the products of spatio-temporal social context to which a community belongs (Leary and Tangney 2012: 74, 88). As such, the self is a social construction developed through social interactions (Callero 2003: 121).

Scholarly understanding of selfhood and identity has registered significant shifts, leading to the emergence of the concepts of enlightenment, sociological and postmodern subjects. The first formulates the notion of 'human person as a fully centered, unified individual . . . , endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness, and action'; the centre 'consisted of an inner core which first emerged when the subject was born, and unfolded with it, while remaining essentially the same – continuous

or "identical" with itself – throughout the individual's existence'. The second underlines that 'identity is formed in the "interaction" between self and society; the subject still has an inner core or essence that is "the real me"', but this is formed and modified in a continuous dialogue with the cultural worlds' (Hall 1996b: 597). The last sets in the deconstruction process by discarding the idea that 'individuals are in possession of a core, rational, unitary self, endowed with an essential nature and an independent consciousness'. The self, as defined by Foucault, is the 'direct consequence of power and can only be apprehended in terms of historically specific systems of discourse' (Callero 2003: 117). While postmodernists thus advocate for 'the social construction of identity as a more viable basis of the collective self' (Cerulo 1997: 387), they challenge 'the foundation of a universal self' and 'the assumption of an agentic and knowledgeable actor' (Callero 2003: 118). Against this backdrop, other scholars suggest that, instead of 'an abandonment or abolition' of 'the subject', as postmodernists do, we should attempt at its 'reconceptualization' (Hall 1996b: 2). The reconceptualisation is attempted first through ideological and methodological modifications by deploying the Merleau-Ponty notion of reflexivity.<sup>1</sup> Callero observes that the 'self conceived in this way allows for agency, creative action, and the possibility of emancipatory political movements' (2003: 120). The second modification scholars suggest is the deployment of historical methodology instead of setting the study against the limited temporal context, which the sociologists generally do. Callero argues that

a full understanding of self-meanings, self-images, and self-concepts requires a broad conceptualization of context, one that extends beyond the immediate definition of the situation to include the historical and cultural settings where unarticulated assumptions about the nature of the person have their origin.

(*ibid.*: 121)

Like self, landscape has involved especially the archaeologists, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, geographers and arts specialists (Whyte 2002: 13). Lexically, landscape constitutes 'everything you can see when you look across a large area of land, especially in the country' and also 'a painting of a view of the countryside' (Hornby 2005: 862). The conclusion that we may draw is that landscape is conceived both as a physical idea and its representation. J.B. Jackson defines landscape as 'a portion of the earth's surface that can be comprehended at a glance'. It is constituted of two elements – 'the world out there' and 'the world perceived' – interacting with the above (cited in Gerike 1979: 14). He emphasises that landscape is largely 'a

composition of man-made or man-modified spaces' (ibid.). Therefore, in modern landscape study, what is salient is the 'human imprint' that transforms nature into a cultural element. In fact, since Renaissance, the idea of landscape has emerged as a cultural concept (Cosgrove 1998: 1).

The 'landscape as a cultural process' renders it a dynamic rather than a 'static text' (Taylor 2008: 2). This process involves the gradual transformation of physical landscape first into a cultural ecology and then into political ecology. As a cultural idea, landscape is displayed in literature, painting, myths and more (ibid.). As political ecology, it deals with politically mediated 'social relations of nature' or 'social production of nature'. This reduces socio-nature into a part of 'political projects that changed power relations at different scales and created new political ecologies' (Pye 2012: 199–200). Interestingly, the cultural process involves the double making of the nature and human beings. Therefore, while pristine nature is converted by human beings into a cultural zone, the process conducts the reinvention of human self and sensibilities, thereby creating a 'shared system of beliefs and ideologies' (Taylor 2008: 3). This is particularly manifest in the way we recollect our landscape. But this memory 'is not always associated with pleasure. It can be associated sometimes with loss, with pain, with social fracture and sense of belonging gone' (ibid.: 2).

Every landscape has a history of its own, as also a part of the generic history. Cosgrove writes: 'Landscape is a way of seeing the world that has its own history, a history that can be understood only as a part of wider history of economy and society' (1998: 1).<sup>2</sup> R. White avers that the intersection between natural and cultural is 'absolutely pivotal to understanding the past' (cited in Carruthers 2004: 380). As a site of history, landscape often functions as archaeology, as a document, comprising 'layers of history, with every landscape an accumulation of the past' (Gerike 1979: 15). This inspires Jackson to call it 'a beautiful book', an open documentation waiting to be read (cited in Taylor 2008: 2), and also why Carruthers comments: 'African environmental history is being reconceptualised as a sophisticated tool for telling better social, political, economic or as other histories' (2004: 386).

The 'relationship between nature and culture' is a study in 'comparative dynamics' (Cronon 1993: 12–14). This leads us to the question of how a change in landscape vis-à-vis self can be fruitfully studied. In the African context, Kwashirai observes that as Africa's terrain had undergone transformation over several millennia, the long range of change makes it essential for environmental historians to 'employ a deeper timeframe in spite of the methodological limitations'.<sup>3</sup> Leach

and Mearns are close when they recommend the use of 'historical' and 'time series data' (1996: 443).

Thus, scholars consider self and landscape as closely related and complementary terms. The notion of self develops in a sociocultural and physical context that includes landscape also. Likewise, landscape is a natural and cultural element, the latter being the creation of human agency. This interrelationship has been evocatively formulated by Tim Ingold, when he observes that the human knowledge or senses of the world 'grows from the very soil of an existential involvement in the sensible world'. As such, this world is not the mere product of 'mental representation, but more fundamentally . . . a way of living creatively in a world that is itself crescent, always in formation' (2000: 1). He further argues that 'human beings must simultaneously be constituted both as organisms within systems of ecological relations, and as persons within systems of social relations'. They are, therefore, 'the developing organism-in-its-environment' as opposed to the self-contained individual confronting a world 'out there' (ibid.: 3-4). After developing the idea of 'environmentally situated agents', Ingold finally observes 'the boundaries between person and place, or between the self and the landscape, dissolve altogether' (ibid.: 5, 56).

This study on self and landscape helps us draw some broad conclusions. First, the notions of individual/collective self develop out of contexts. Second, contexts being social and environmental, self and landscape are intertwined. Third, as conscious agents, human beings conduct the reinvention of self and the landscape. This reflexive character of self/identity (Callero 2003: 120) enables the individual/group to make a creative reading of the situation and decide the course of action (Leary and Tangney 2012: 71). Last, because of their distance in time between an event or epoch and the present, 'landscapes involve interactions between the present and the past, and give a sense of identity at individual, local, regional and national scales' (Whyte 2002: 7). And this interaction can be meaningfully apprehended historically.

We are aware that the group agency has factored gender and ethnic political activism at both national and global levels. This has made a study of collective self/identity assertion relevant and compelling. Since there is a growing trend to historically visit the issue of assertion, the next section of this volume attempts to find how the Adivasis of Bihar and Jharkhand sought to fashion their self in the context of landscape. However, it is appropriate to explain in what precise sense the terms landscape and self have been invoked in this study.

Landscape here means the physical or geographical entity which is constituted by three elements – land, water and forest – the famous

triad of *jal*, jungle and *jameen* in Adivasi identity discourse. Significantly, change in the composition of landscape from a natural space to cultural space and its transformation from an autonomous territory to a servile landscape have been historical phenomena. This study seeks to engage both with the idea of its older and changing versions. Second, the study seeks to understand the way landscape is envisioned or imaged by the indigenous groups, which often turns it into a symbol. Last, the term will be used as the idea of space that constitutes the environment or ecology, both social and political. This helps us grapple with the social and political forces involved in the change of physical landscape into a cultural one.

However, the term *self* has been deployed in the study not in the 'I' but 'We' sense. Therefore, *self* represents its collective or social variety. This collectivistic approach necessitates the study of the concept of boundary – both cultural and territorial – that the Adivasis created as a mark of distinction and differentiation. This makes the study of the relationship between *self* and landscape relevant. But since (like landscape) the Adivasis lost their agency and were transformed into a dependent and marginalised group, building an understanding of the inventive variety of this relationship becomes necessary. This sets in the historic process in which a particular ethnic group moves towards interethnic combinations. Therefore, as the Munda/Santal/Ho acquires the state-based identity of Jharkhandi Adivasi, then this state-centric identity assumes pan-Indian identity which finally merges with the global identity movement to assume the nomenclature of world indigene. Simultaneously, the idea of landscape transcends its regional, state and national characters to arrogate a global dimension. This sets the stage for the functioning of the dynamics of *self-fashioning vis-à-vis* landscape.

### **Dynamics of self-fashioning: being, becoming and belonging**

Before initiating a discussion on how Adivasis represented themselves, it is pertinent to clarify what the author means by *self-fashioning*. This combination of two words, *self* and *fashioning*, lexically connotes the act of forming or shaping the personality or character of a person or group of people so that he/they may be differentiated from other people. As such, this act leads to a clear distinction from what others conceive of him or them. To elaborate further, *self-fashioning* is both an idea of *self* ('weness') and as conceived by the group to differentiate them from others, that is, 'they'. This also involves the process by which this

is negotiated. This section will first visit the process, followed by analysing the role of Adivasis in structuring the knowledge of self.

The author argues that the notion of identity or selfhood (of belonging to the Adivasi community) is the sum of three intertwined but shifting ideas – that of being, becoming and finally belonging. Being is generally understood to be the notion of inner, authentic, personal and essential quality/qualities in either an individual or community. Essentialism attributes to it an unchanging character that makes it incompatible with human existence that involves a process of constant remaking or becoming. This controverts attribution of essential characters, in line with postmodernist rebuttal of essentialism, to either an individual or social collectivity (Cerulo 1997: 386).

What we are concerned with is that despite the rebuttal, core or essence plays a formative role in Adivasi self-fashioning. Existentialist philosopher Sartre famously observed: 'Existence precedes essence'. It premises that essence is the predicate of human existence. Since an individual/community exist(s) 'there-in-the-world', he/they is/are amenable to the worldly law of change. Leaving the burden of philosophy here, our historical understanding prompts us to envisage the mutuality of these notions. Accordingly, while essence invents existence, essence or ideal self is also progressively invented by existence. As stated before, Hall also supports this argument. This changed being continues to determine reconfiguring of the self. What I argue about is that this swapping of positions is central when we engage with Adivasi self-portrayal. This makes the notion of self/identity a 'moveable feast', when the 'subject assumes different identities at different times', identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self' (Hall 1996a: 598). This way, 'identity and its cognate terms' seek to resolve 'the perennial philosophical problems of permanence amidst manifest change, and of unity amidst manifest diversity' (Cooper 2005: 60–2). But the salient fact about Adivasi identity assertion is that the notion of being continues to act as a kind of beacon from which the community cannot take its eyes off. This involves them in a never-ending self-created crisis of identity. My argument is that this change in continuity (the interplay of being and becoming) finally creates the sense of affinity or belonging.

Another significant fact is that change in self and landscape is a coeval and intermeshed process. We would like to conceptualise this linkage reinvoking Ingold's formulation of human beings as 'organisms within systems of ecological relations' and 'the developing organism-in-its-environment'. This ecology and environment are constituted by social and physical elements, the latter being represented by landscape.

Since, like self, landscape continues to be transformed through time due to human intervention, the invention of landscape factors the remaking of the notion of self also.

### Contemporary self-portrayal

To apprehend the role of the community in embodying the knowledge of self, this study draws on their creation myths, legends and traditions, rare but significant colonial-day recordings of Santal oral traditions like *Horkoren Mare Hapramko Reak Katha* and the recordings of Ho memories in the Village Papers.<sup>4</sup> Together, the work engages with the ideas and institutions of social governance and other archival sources for portraying a complete picture of self-representation during pre-colonial and colonial times. Of these, myths, legends and traditions were kinds of soliloquy or internal narrative produced and reproduced as a means of recording experiences, feelings and self-identification. On the other hand, ideas and institutions of governance and contemporary – self-portrayal may be regarded as a dialogue with the self and other to address both internal and external needs. Against these, the recordings of memories of village histories were testimonies before colonial officials to serve an administrative purpose.

The contemporary self-portrayal betrays the diverse impact of the colonial past. First, invoking the past was marked by the tendency of selective and purposeful appropriation/interpretation of data from colonial sources by Adivasi intelligentsia. As mentioned earlier, they tended often to read their past and identity in the light of the colonial ethnologists and ethnographers like Dalton, Hunter, Risley, Grierson and others. However, it is understood that colonial-day scholars often subjectively appropriated tribal pasts and invented the images of these communities (Cederlof 2013: 401–3). Despite this, there is a tendency among Adivasi intelligentsia to treat this tribal discourse as the true representation of the Adivasi. What we generally understand as their self-fashioning does not always remain ‘autonomous constructions of the Adivasi mind’. Second, in asserting recent claims for right as a citizen, we notice a tendency of drawing legitimacy not on the basis of natural right but on the colonial-day personalities like Thomas Wilkinson in Chota Nagpur and John Sullivan in the Nilgiri region (ibid.: 402), as also colonial rules and acts like Wilkinson’s civil rules, SPT Act and CNT Act (Sen 2012b: 184). This hegemonisation in a way bred centrifugal tendency. To illustrate, in recent decades, some Ho intellectuals and activists claimed that Kolhan should be converted into a union territory under the President of India. This was inspired

by the fact that the Kolhan Government Estate, which the British created in 1837, was under the direct control of the governor general, who, as the protagonists believed, is the equivalent of the President of India.<sup>5</sup> This focus on the ethnic specificities of different Adivasi communities marked a clear departure from their pan-ethnic assertion of Adivasiness. Therefore, it becomes clear that the changes colonialism brought among them considerably fragmented their subjecthood. This rendered representation of their self vis-à-vis landscape a 'more open-ended, variable and problematic' issue (Hall 1996a: 597).

We should now apprehend the total content of Adivasi self-portrayal. Since this encompassed three temporalities precolonial, colonial and contemporary – it is crucial for a researcher to set up a dialogue between the present and the past. Despite being fragmentary, precolonial history shows the crystallisation of consciousness as a distinct demographic group, as well as affinity to a territory and an autonomous social governance of communal life and natural resources. This was the time when they were the agents of history. Their myth and folklore depict the image of an 'idyllic' landscape and selfhood. This was the notion of 'remembered landscape' in the Chota Nagpur plateau. Here, the Mundas and Oraons had cleared the forests and driven out the wild animals to set up their villages; the Hos had founded a sacred homeland at Hodesum; and the Santals had achieved their cultural acme in Chae Champa. This was the Arcadian notion, that is, their being, supposedly characterised by their quiet, dignified and happy communal life.

However, things started systematically changing during feudal and colonial eras when they were territorially and culturally subjugated. The conversion of the 'remembered landscape' into 'the landscape of servitude' imposed in them the identity of servitude and marginality. This transformation (the pressure of becoming) reinvented the fashioning of the idea of being itself. But the notion of idyllic selfhood was so defining that the Adivasis continued to harp on the salience of this being. We notice the function of the original and modified being as we engage with the contemporary self-representation.

Before we elaborate the way Adivasis asserted identity, we should form a clear idea of the spatio-demographic 'boundaries', which define an ethnic group, determine its membership (the process of inclusion) and differentiate the group from others (the process of exclusion) (Barth 1966: 15). In fact, the notion of boundary segments groups into 'us' and 'them' – in and out groups (Lamont and Molnar 2002: 169–70). But how does setting up of notional and real boundaries create the understanding of unity and difference? According to Frederick

Cooper, identity or self denotes 'what they share with and how they differ from others' and how they

persuade people to understand themselves, their interests, and their predicaments in a certain way, to persuade certain people that they are (for certain purposes) "identical" with one another and at the same time different from others, and to organize and justify collective action along certain lines.

(2005: 60-2)

But there is yet another part to this story. This is the formation of larger self-centric aggregates, when under the changed contexts people 'include others in their self judgments' and 'incorporate others into identity' (Leary and Tangney 2012: 83-5). This action was enacted at different levels among Adivasis, who created wider ethnic, trans-ethnic and territorial networks, the latter being regional, provincial, national and global in dimensions.

The regional-level disparate ethnic identities crystallised with cultural and territorial affinities as defining symbols. Consequently, the Munda and Oraon identified themselves with the Chota Nagpur plateau, the Ho with Kolhan and the Santal with Santal Parganas. The circle was widened when, on the basis of cultural affinity and Adivasi preponderance in the Chota Nagpur and Santal Pargana divisions of Bihar, which later comprised Jharkhand state, interethnic provincial Adivasi identity emerged. The Adivasi intelligentsia of Bihar and Jharkhand explored core elements of their identity, which they believed provided the ideological cushion to their mobilisation. However, it cannot be denied that such 'essentialist representations' had a political resonance' (Baviskar 2006: 43).

First, the Adivasi intelligentsia reiterated the purity of their origin from Austro-Asiatic/Austriac (Munda) and Dravidian or Proto-Austroloic (Oraon) groups and their essential distinction from the people of Aryan origin (Kujur and Beck 2008: 19-21; Munda 2008: 313). Second, they affirmed that the identity of the Adivasis in south Bihar has had a territorial basis. This was why on the forum of the Constituent Assembly, Jaipal Singh opposed the proposal of descheduling of the districts of Hazaribagh and Palamau from the Chota Nagpur division on grounds of 'the economic, geographical and ethnic unity and entity of the Chota Nagpur Division' (Amit Prakash 1999: 478). Furthermore, in the 1990s, an Adivasi intellectual pointed out that the territorial specificity of Jharkhand had a historical basis, which stood recognised during the rule of the Mogul Emperor Akbar in

*Ain-i-Akbari* by Abul Fazl (ibid.: 488). Third, they affirmed their identification as the original people or the natives of the country, more so in Jharkhand. This was why on 24 August 1949 Jaipal Singh affirmed before the Constituent Assembly that tribal people were the original inhabitants and as such they had a genuine claim over the entire country (ibid.: 481). He further reiterated that 'The aboriginal is a child of the soil and everything should be done to see that he remains rooted to his foundations. Once the aboriginal loses his land he is completely lost' (2003: 12). Moreover, the Adivasi intelligentsia underlines their cultural distinction from non-Adivasis on the ground that their society is basically homogenous and egalitarian. Jaipal Singh observed that internal democracy was the core element of tribal life where 'all are equal, rich or poor. Everyone has equal opportunity' (Amit Prakash 1999: 482). The sixth element the intelligentsia group harps on is the customary practice of social governance as represented by their Manki-Munda and Parha-Parganait systems (Jaipal Singh 2003: 11; Sundi 2012: 8; Sinku 2008: 114–36). The efficacy of this institution presumably inspired the Chota Nagpur Improvement Society to assert that 'each village should have its own Corporation for self-government in civil matters and judicial panchayat in certain matters and executive body in dealing with village lands' (Amit Prakash 1999: 472). We find that this custom-centrism equated them with other trans-Indian indigenous communities.<sup>6</sup> Yet another element the Adivasi intelligentsia affirm is their rural and agrarian identity, having a symbiotic link with nature around them.<sup>7</sup> This affirmation argues for the close linkage between Adivasi identity and landscape. Furthermore, they focus on a distinct linguistic identity and claim that this status should be duly recognised by the Indian Constitution.<sup>8</sup> Last, they consider themselves as followers of a distinct religion more popularly called *Sarna Dharam*, which R.D. Munda preferred to name as *Adi Dharam* (2000). As such, they should no longer be classified either as animist or as Hindu.

During colonial rule, self-identification and mobilisation took a wider form. This saw the regional and provincial identities assuming a pan-Indian sub-nationhood or a minority status (Bowen 2000: 12), calling for the mobilisation of the indigenous groups in India. Minoritism derives its justification from the long history of their marginalisation and deprivation. One may find here a similarity with African indigenes. About Nkoya, the comment is that their ethnicity was based not only on their primordial attachment to a way of life, culture and language, but also on 'a collective sense of deprivation in the course of a shared recent history' (Chanock 1985: 18). Another significant fact was the timing and the occasion. When the nationalist intelligentsia

was engaged in defining Indian identity, Adivasi intelligentsia was involved in advocating sub-nationalist ethnic identity (for details, see Amit Prakash 1999: 461–96). This assertion came to the forefront during the visit of the Simon Commission and at the Indian Constituent Assembly, respectively, in the 1930s and 1940s.

The post-independence phase witnessed further widening of the demographic and territorial basis. As the national corporate and multinational companies threatened their hearth and home as well as their natural resources, there occurred a growing mobilisation and tie-up with other indigenous groups globally for an international identity (Bowen 2000: 13; Kingsbury 1998: 416–19), though not severing their national linkage. Both at the national and global levels, Adivasi intelligentsia reiterated the idea of the historicity of oppression, servility and marginalisation (Karlsson 2003: 407; Bowen 2000: 12–13; Bayly 1997: 170). They, therefore, believe that Indian ethnic groups are entitled to a privileged status and protection of their territory and rights, as has been done under the Indian Constitution and the reiteration of human rights by the UNO.

Nonetheless, two significant trends should not escape our attention. First, widening of selfhood from ethnic to interethnic and broadening of the territorial identity from regional to provincial, to national and global could not submerge interethnic differences mostly in terms of territory, language and custom. Therefore, formation of broader aggregates coexisted with the ethnic and regional identities. Second, the reiteration of some core elements or essences could not obfuscate the existence of a creative tension between being, becoming and belonging impacted by critical historical forces. History does not bear any evidence of a distinct racial consciousness in the past, though distance from non-ethnic groups, particularly hatred for the upper-caste Hindus and Muslims, may be discernible.<sup>9</sup> But it is doubtful if it was purely on racial grounds. However, the claim of originality may be historically supported, even though recurrent migrations, as depicted by their oral traditions and recorded history, contested this claim. Ebbing away of egalitarianism and homogeneity, which socio-economic fissures evidenced, clearly suggest that protagonists of essentialism did not learn from history. Similarly, though custom-centrism of Adivasi communities is historically tenable, it cannot be denied that their customs were socially reinvented during precolonial times and hybridised by colonial rulers into Anglo-tribal customs. This was equally true about their traditional system of governance, which originated during the pre-British period and was legitimised and reinforced by the British. But invented customs and the institution of social governance were internalised by

Adivasi communities as their essential identity markers. The onset of ruralisation and agrarianism was similarly mediated by time. Before the invention of *Olchicki* script of the Santals by Raghunath Murmu in the 1920s and *Waran Kshiti* of the Hos by Lako Bodra in the 1950s, these groups were pre-literate like the Munda and Oraon. Therefore, the claim of constitutional status (inclusion in the Eighth Schedule) as an independent linguistic group registers a tacit admission of change through time. This makes it clear that contemporary self-fashioning is political and not always historically representative.

The question is why contemporary identity assertion tends often to be ahistoric, more so why this tendency to focus on being rather than becoming? Alain Touraine argues that in the modern and postmodern world, particularly after globalisation, distinct identities are steadily obliterated by the 'eminently seductive idea of the global melting pot that will make us citizens of one world'. Consequently, not only moral culture, but the hearth and home of the distinct communities also are constantly under severe threat of extinction. In this gloomy atmosphere of a threatened identity,

throughout the world there are more and more identity-based groupings and associations, sects, cults and nationalisms based on a common sense of belonging, and that they are becoming stronger. Societies are becoming communities once more as they closely unify a culture, politics and power within territories governed by religious, cultural, ethnic or political authorities that might be called charismatic, in that they derive their legitimacy not from the sovereignty of people, economic efficiency or even military conquest, but from the gods, myths or traditions of a community . . . (and) a call for homogeneity, purity and unity.

(Touraine 2000: 1-3)

The tension between being and becoming, which distinguishes contemporary Adivasi public life, needs to be historically contextualised and examined. Our quest, which focusses on land, water and forest-centric selfhood, should be whether there had been attempts in the past towards self-imaging; whether there was any conscious attempt to embody the core or essential elements in Adivasiness; whether history presents instances of centripetal and centrifugal tendencies among these communities; and whether the pressure of becoming prompted reinvention of ideal selfhood or the notion of being and vice versa. The following chapters will seek to grapple with these issues, beginning with the creation myths.

## Notes

- 1 This notion was developed by G.H. Mead (1863–1931), the famous American philosopher, sociologist and psychologist, in his book *Mind, Self and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934.
- 2 We can add two more remarks. Cronon observes that ‘transformed countryside (is) bound to human history’ (Cronon 2003: 6). McNeill writes ‘Human history has always and will always unfold within a larger biological and physical context’ (2003: 6).
- 3 Kwashirai, ‘Environmental History of Africa’, 2.
- 4 Nandini Sundar evocatively argues in favour of such non-conventional sources in ‘Village Histories: Coalescing the Past and the Present’ (2006: 144–82; see also Gyan Prakash 1990: 35).
- 5 Singhbhumi Ekta, Vol. I, No.13, July 1979.
- 6 In the context of African tribes, Chanock wrote: “Custom” came to be a crucial index of group identity’ (Chanock 1985: 9).
- 7 Speech of C.B. Deogam, a leading Ho intellectual, social activist and a member of the Chaibasa Bar, delivered at the workshop deliberating on the Central Government’s Draft on Tribal National Policy held at Chaibasa on 8 May 2004; Interview with D.N. Champia and Ghanashyam Gagrai, leading Ho intellectuals, Chaibasa, 8 May 2004 (cited in Sen 2006: 304–5).
- 8 After the inclusion of the Santal language in the eighth schedule, language movement has intensified among other tribal groups in Jharkhand.
- 9 Roughsedge to Metcalfe, 9 May 1820, para 13.