CHAPTER 1

Introduction

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COLONIAL RULE had a varied impact upon the different adivasi communities in India and produced a wide range of responses among them in their transition to modernity. As these became encapsulated within the British Raj, their socio-economic organizations and political institutions came to be deeply affected. In course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Company's administration devised a twin strategy to integrate the adivasi regions within the provinces of British India: the imposition of a system of paternalistic rule by district officers and that of a new legal system, which impinged upon the cohesive tribal community structure. The changed mode of political control came to redefine the status of different groups of adivasis on the one hand, and eliminate much of the influence of the traditional adivasi leadership on the other. This led to a disintegration of the old village institutions and the distortion of the roles of some of the key village functionaries. The move to categorize the people and their privileges resulted in the imposition of uniform systems, replacing pre-existing local differences and complexities.

Changes within the village social structure and the application of new legal definitions naturally impacted upon the adivasi economy as

well. Earlier it had been based upon a close integration of agriculture and forest products, but under colonial rule, there was a noticeable extension of settled cultivation and a departure from swidden cultivation. The second major development related to the reservation of forests. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, large parts of the forest were placed out of reach for villagers, as a result of which there was a greater dependence on agricultural production. There was also a greater influx of outsiders into these regions as well as migration of adivasis from their homelands to far-off plantations and mines in search of a livelihood. All of these had significant economic and cultural implications. The tensions arising from the intrusion of colonial authority found expression in acts of rebellion, as the different adivasi groups in India sought to adjust to the new stresses and strains. To the state, however, such dissent represented a law-and-order problem and was ruthlessly suppressed. On some occasions, the colonial state did appear to relent and sought to settle conflicts through negotiation. Nevertheless, the everyday forms of protest on the part of the adivasis was too regular an experience for the state to ignore.

The adivasi world, therefore, figured in official perceptions as the backdrop of the counter-insurgency measures of the colonial state and the adivasi was portrayed as a savage, whether 'criminal' and wreaking terror in the countryside, or 'noble' and living a life of Arcadian simplicity in an egalitarian society.[1] Through such models, British administrators sought to justify their presence and portray themselves as the protectors of life and security in the region. In course of the nineteenth century, colonial ethnographers came to rely largely on the 'scientific' criteria of ethnology—'physical character', 'language', 'civilization' and 'religion'. Nonetheless, there was no fixed colonial 'tribal' policy, nor was there a single set of ideas concerning tribes, generated either by the colonial power itself or arising out of a process of interaction and adaptation. Instead, we find that several, often contradictory policies towards the indigenous people emerged in course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The colonial representation of 'tribe' has triggered off a debate concerning the notion of 'tribe'. As early as 1969, at a seminar on the 'Tribal Situation in India', Niharranjan Ray, arguing from a nationalist standpoint, asserted that communities which had been grouped as 'tribes' under colonial rule were nothing but *janas* or peoples. He identified two fundamental forms of social organization in ancient India, that of the *jati*, which was hierarchical, and that of the *jana*, which was more egalitarian, but at a lower level of technology. The

two, however, were not distinct and separate entities. There had been a long tradition of a slow and gradual integration of the *janas* within the different hierarchical levels of the *jati* system. However, according to Ray, British colonial policy exposed them to a new legal and economic system and to a quicker tempo of modernization than they could accommodate, thereby introducing within them new stresses and tensions. Such turmoil continued after independence, as post-colonial India inherited and perpetuated the divisive notions of 'criminal' tribes—which was replaced by the term 'denotified' tribes—and 'Scheduled Tribes', in association with 'Scheduled Castes'. At the same time, Independence, democracy and adult franchise released many hitherto submerged social forces and ignited a search for a sense of identity and self-determination in a new social order.[2] The concept of 'tribe' today has thus been dismissed as a colonial invention, an outcome of the legitimizing ideology of the colonial state which sought to categorize the conquered populations, formulate imperial policies and facilitate the incorporation of these populations into the imperial system.[3] Moreover, it has been argued that post-Enlightenment governing practices which the British introduced in India entailed counting fixed identities and enabled people to see and organize themselves in the light of these categories. Hence, fixed ethnic stereotypes were imposed upon a variety of social formations, ignoring the complexities in their socio-economic organizations, history and cultural patterns.[4]

While the usage of the word 'tribe', with its implicit evolutionary and racial content, has justly come under close scrutiny in the current global political climate, along with other elements of colonial terminology, the existence of distinct ethnic communities denoted by the term cannot be considered to have been entirely a figment of the European imagination. Hindu caste society had, since ancient times, been derogatory of life in the wilderness. The colonial discourse on 'tribe' in India had been largely informed by prevailing concepts among the dominant caste groups and the colonial state appropriated such representations as part of their categorization.[5] In this sense, 'tribe' may be considered to be more a brahmanical construct than a colonial one.[6] We may, thus, argue that 'tribal' communities, being historically determined social groups, had distinct trajectories of development. They differed in structure from the dominant Hindu caste hierarchy and certainly pre-existed the colonial rule. However, in course of colonial rule, these groups came to be identified in racial and evolutionary terms. Hence, community identities gradually became rigidified and homogenized.

Assimilation *v.* Isolation

One of the chief concerns of the colonial government vis-à-vis the adivasis related to whether they were to be protected and isolated from the mainstream population. Emphasizing the pluralistic tendency of Indian society, the British government had asserted that 'tribals' were a segmentary polity and could not be assimilated into the mainstream Indian society. This issue developed into a major debate in the 1940s when nationalist-minded anthropologists took the position that tribes were an essential component of the Indian civilization. Thus, G.S. Ghurye asserted that adivasis were indeed a part of mainstream Hindu culture and needed to be totally assimilated.[7] Ghurye, in fact, used the defensive term, 'Backward Hindus' to describe the 'tribal' people of India.

In stark contrast to the assimilationist approach was the isolationist approach of Verrier Elwin.[8] Elwin considered 'tribal history' to be a story of economic exploitation and cultural destruction of the adivasis by the dominant caste society.[9] He held both colonial rulers and Hindu moneylenders and landlords responsible for uprooting adivasis from their indigenous production system and placing them within the peasant production network. As a result, they could neither benefit from the mainstream economic growth nor go back to their subsistence-based primitive production system. Their condition, according to Elwin, was worse where they lived in a Hindu-majority area. Thus, when the 'tribal' question came up for discussion in course of the 1940s, he insisted on what came to be known as the 'national park' approach for the development of the tribals, the most vulnerable section of Indian population.[10] His ideas grew out of his studies, particularly of the Baigas of central India, in course of which he observed that, despite their extreme exploitation and poverty, the Baigas still dreamed of having a Baiga Raj in which they would have their own king and no exploitation by outsiders. The 'national park' idea of development was critiqued by Ghurye, who argued that Hindu castes and tribes had been in a symbiotic relationship since ancient times,[11] and by M.N. Srinivas.[12] Srinivas argued that all social groups, however primitive they may be, had the potential to adopt new technology for survival which, in turn, would lead to an advanced production system. Elwin countered these criticisms by describing himself as a protectionist rather than as an isolationist.

The debate on the issue continues to this day. Anthropologists like B.K. Roy Burman, for instance, assert that a nation state cannot integrate different communities without transforming itself.[13] National integration, he argues, does not merely involve the transmission of a national ethos, it also entails the transformation of the total national life and the emergence of a new cluster of values that represent both the integrator and the integrated. Roy Burman believes that integration is essential for the economic progress of the adivasis. However, he concedes that integration could not bring about development on its own without devising certain strategies and techniques.

Nationalists also laid emphasis on the notion of acculturation or the 'tribe-caste-peasant continua'. In the works of both Nirmal Kumar Bose[14] and Surajit Sinha,[15] who wrote at a later period in the 1960s, the emphasis was at the level of the tribal village life and the transmission of Hindu cultural influence through Hindu service groups, settled in the villages, and through Vaishnavite mendicants. Anthropological research of the post-Independence period also focused on Hindu cultural influence. F.G. Bailey argues that adoption of Hindu cultural norms first occurred among the village elite and thence it spread to the rest of the community.[16] In his study of the Santhals, Martin Orans, on the other hand, moves away from the tribe-caste continuum thesis and puts forward his theory of 'emulation-solidarity conflict'.[17]

Histories of Rebellions

Anthropological studies have emphasized the theme of cultural contact between 'tribes' and 'castes', thus contributing to our understanding of cultural change in adivasi societies. However, these tend to concentrate on the 'present' and have inadequately traced the process of changing power relationships at the village and the supra-village level. Many changes in the tribal world, such as the religious revitalization movements, cannot be understood outside the context of rural power relations. Researches of historians, on the other hand, had for long, tended to concentrate on protest movements and rebellions. A common theme in such research relates to the disintegration of the relatively isolated adivasi societies as a result of the colonial encounter. It has been argued that the new economic opportunities ushered in by British rule saw the influx of exploitative outsiders, the *dikus*, into the tribal regions, with the result that adivasis gradually lost their lands to *diku* moneylenders and landlords. The resultant revolts have been variously interpreted as conscious political movements against colonial rule,[18] or as religious revitalization and millenarian movements,[19] with 'rebellious prophets' promising their followers to drive out the outsiders and bring back a golden age where 'there will be enough to eat, no famine, the people will live together in love'[20] and, in the case of

the rebellions of 1857, as instances of the 'First War of Independence'.[21] Such movements were seen as 'a crude form of protest' against changes and outside influences, 'a gesture of despair'.[22] To J.C. Jha, for instance, these protest movements were 'blind and groping', as the rebels, being inarticulate, did not know how to express their legitimate grievances.[23]

The theme of economic change and its impact continued to dominate later studies on adivasi movements. Increasingly, there were attempts to analyse differences in the forms of rebellion of the different adivasi groups over time. Nevertheless, the assumption continued that despite occasional cultural interactions and borrowing of non-tribal religious and cultural symbols by adivasis, the economic interests of these two groups were inherently antagonistic. Thus, John MacDougall[24] argues that the nature of tribal rebellions varied as a consequence of differences in the peasantization of adivasi society and in the process of resource mobilization, while Prabhu Prasad Mohapatra interprets the continuous conflicts between landlords and tenants in the agrarian regimes of Chotanagpur in terms of a 'class struggle'.[25] Significantly, both nationalist and Marxist interpretations tend to resemble the colonial stereotypes that had perpetuated the myth of an 'undifferentiated' tribal mass needing protection against exploitative outsiders. In contrast, recent studies have highlighted conflicts within the internal hierarchy of the adivasi communities,[26] on the one hand, and, on the other, have challenged the Subalternist contention of tribal autonomy by emphasizing linkages between the tribal communities and the supra-village power structure.[27]

Another theme in the analysis of adivasi rebellions relates to their linkage with the nationalist movement against colonial rule. Attempting a characterization of the changing nature of tribal revolts, K.S. Singh has identified three major phases of revolt: the first, between 1795 and 1860, which he terms the phase of primary resistance, the second, between 1860 and 1920, a period characterized by a mix of agrarian, religious and political issues, and the third, between 1920 and 1947, which saw the rise of a movement of a secular or political nature. Singh thus takes 1920 to be the great watershed between rebellions which were 'sporadic, isolated and spontaneous' and a new phase of tribal politics marked by 'movements which could be sustained only by organization and through external stimuli,'[28] i.e. through the message and personality of Mahatma Gandhi. This distinction between the pre- and post-1920 revolts does not, however, always hold good. Nor did contacts with the national movement provide any new organization for rebel adivasis. Some local Congressmen, only occasionally, came in contact with them, but they had their own agenda; and the provincial

Congress was normally very lukewarm in its support for any agrarian movement. This point has been discussed by Subalternist scholars[29] who argue that the subaltern classes, in this case the adivasi peasants, had a substantial degree of cultural and political autonomy vis-à-vis the statist politics and project of the nationalist elites. These scholars have focused on different facets of the rebel peasant consciousness and on the complexities that underlay the non-hierarchical and relatively egalitarian social structures.

Recent researches on adivasi rebellions have raised many new questions. We may mention two of such works. One of these examines the interface between the political and artistic agencies that authorized, produced and disseminated to the British public, images of colonial coercion against subaltern insurgency in course of the Santhal *hul* of 1855. Rycroft reinterprets the historic context of the rebellion and develops the notion of 'counter-insurgency complex' to comprehend the ideological tensions and slippages inherent in imperial visual narratives.[30] In another study, Prathama Banerjee has reconstructed different encounters between the 'primitive' Santhal and the colonized *bhadralok* historian of Bengal in the space of the market, in travel, in historical and literary texts and other sites. This interface, the author argues, led both to the making of the 'historical' in a colonial society and to the making of a people into a 'tribe'.[31] Thus, while the issue of rebellion has predominated in the historical writings on adivasis, we see new trends surfacing, reflecting the current ideological issues of the time.

Significantly, in recent years scholars have questioned whether there was anything intrinsically 'adivasi' about violent resistance, since peasant societies have time and again resorted to similar means of protest. Crispin Bates and Alpa Shah, for instance, underline the need for a historically-situated approach to understand adivasi resistance and have pointed out the wide variety in the forms of mobilization encompassing both violent and non-violent agitations. Nevertheless, the dominant imagery of tribal protest has remained one of violent resistance to date.[32]

New Histories of the Tribes

In recent years, there has been considerable research which focuses on adivasi societies, and not merely on the aspect of rebellion. A pioneering research in the economic history of Chotanagpur was that of the Dhanbad Research Project of Heidelberg University which was conducted by Dietmar Rothermund, D. Schewerin, D.C. Wadhwa and

others.[33] Tracing the linkages between the agrarian society and the new mining system in the region around the coal-mining area of Dhanbad in eastern Chotanagpur, it asserted that the history of the Indian coalfield was determined by the zamindars and the British managing agencies. The former controlled land and labour and held the sub-soil rights of the region, while the latter extended their operations to the area. Thus, as Rothermund argues, the coalfields of Chotanagpur developed as enclaves under colonial rule and the benefits of economic development did not percolate to the adivasis of the region.[34] The issue of tribal migration is another subject that has attracted the attention of scholars. Crispin Bates, for instance, studies the transformation of the adivasi societies in the Central Provinces under British rule, tracing in particular the phenomenon of large-scale migration from the tribal belt to the tea gardens of Jalpaiguri in Assam and as indentured labour abroad.[35] Other researches have also focused on the agrarian issues. Thus, Suchibrata Sen has examined the impact of agrarian change in the Jungle Mahals between 1793 and 1861,[36] while Archana Prasad has studied the impact of the Maratha army movement on the Baigas who were, thus, displaced from their settled tracts and forced to shift to the uplands where they practised swidden cultivation.[37] Another recent history analyses 'rat famines' in north-east India and its role in Mizo history.[38]

Since the 1990s, adivasi communities have come to feature as the subjects of studies on the environmental impact on traditional societies. The focus was on the colonial impact on land, with Ramachandra Guha identifying colonial rule as a major watershed, i.e. a moment of time that marked a major break with the past.[39] Since this seminal study, the notion gained ground that pre-colonial society in South Asia had lived in harmony with the environment. Adivasi societies, along with endogamous caste groups, were seen as natural conservators of the forest. This triggered off a spate of researches into environmental history which tended to equate forests with 'tribals', a standpoint that had earlier been established by colonial ethnographers as also by nationalists wanting to integrate adivasis within the mainstream. However, as Sumit Guha has shown, tribal polities did not evolve in isolation and, indeed, ecologies and ethnic boundaries could entail movements of certain groups over long distances in time. He thus argues that, 'Small endogamous groups did not occupy the same location for long periods of time, and even when they did they lacked exclusive access to particular resources'.[40] Newer research on environmental transformation, therefore, have come to provide a more nuanced reading of its impact upon the rights of the indigenous people.[41]

Some of the histories have focused on the trajectories of development that particular adivasi communities had undergone. Baker's study of the Central Provinces[42] throws light on the continuities and changes between British colonial policies and those of the Marathas. He argues that the former proved to be more disastrous because their scope was wider than that of the preceding states. At the same time, so far as social change was concerned, there was an element of discontinuity, especially as the administration experimented with creating categories of tenantry bearing little relation to rural society at the time. Another significant issue that has been addressed, is the history and implications of the Criminal Tribes Act, with reference to the Korava community and the process of its forced sedentarization in a police and missionary-run settlement.[43]

New methodologies have come up in order to study adivasi societies which blend history, anthropology and the sociology of development and utilize mixed methodologies, combining documentary evidence with participant observation and oral history giving rise to what has been termed as 'hybrid histories'[44] and as 'anthropological history'[45]. However, 'anthropo-history' itself had been in vogue since the 1980s and was a methodology utilized by pioneering scholars of tribal history, such as, Kumar Suresh Singh.[46] Skaria examines the environmental and cultural histories of the Dangs in western India, concentrating on 'the politics of wildness'. Arguing that this was often in an agonistic and sometimes antagonistic relation to Brahmanical and Kshatriya values, he highlights the enactment of wildness in modes of livelihood, kingship and gender relations. With the transformation of practices of wildness following the consolidation of colonial rule, there emerged the new identity of the adivasi. Nandini Sundar traces the changing relations between 'the state' and 'the people' of Bastar. The central theme of the book is how the state was constituted through the dialectic of administrative intervention and popular resistance.

Among the recent questions that are being addressed today is the issue of gender. Shashank Sekhar Sinha makes a valuable contribution to the study of adivasi history through the analysis of gender relations in adivasi societies of Chotanagpur, a relatively neglected field of study. Sinha shows how traditions could structure and influence the construction and reproduction of gender identities. Although women were not positioned as equals in adivasi societies, they played an important role in the traditional division of labour. Under the impact of colonialism and market capitalism, they were pushed to the margins of the resulting political economies. In addition, the spread of caste and religious influences brought about significant shifts in

traditional gender identities. Adivasi women thus faced three systems of discrimination: patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism, working in tandem with each other.[47]

Coming to recent times the redefinition of women's roles in adivasi society and the contentious issue of land rights for adivasi women have been addressed by Nitya Rao, who argues that in adivasi societies, throughout eastern India today, the construct of the 'good woman' is popularized as one who does not make attempts to claim or inherit land.[48] The tools employed to control 'deviant' women are social ostracism, accusation of witchcraft and outcasting. Controlling deviant women through organized acts of violence, such as witch hunts is a common practice and as recent researches have shown, the threat of being declared a 'witch' is a powerful weapon to induce conformism.[49]

Recent studies have increasingly focused on the changing historical realities of adivasis and the internal life of various communities. Sanjukta Das Gupta, for instance, traces the long term continuities and discontinuities with the pre-colonial past in narrating the story of the Ho people of Singhbhum under colonial rule.[50] On a similar vein, Bhangya Bhukya studies the transition of the Lambada community under the Nizams of Hyderabad under colonial rule.[51] Originally caravan traders, they were induced to depend on cattle-raising and agriculture, many being transformed to agricultural labourers. Among recent anthropological writings, Alpa Shah, focusing on the everyday life of poor Munda adivasis near Ranchi, demonstrates the 'dark side of indigeneity', i.e. how the contemporary discourse of indigeneity marginalizes the most vulnerable sections of adivasis.[52]

Overview of Chapters

We, therefore, find that the hitherto neglected adivasi has today emerged as a subject of historical research, with new researches providing imaginative and insightful readings in adivasi history. Indeed, as these show, there has been a shift away from assertions of heroic roles of particular leaders in movements against the Raj, although the focus remains with adivasis as victims of colonial policies. However, there is a danger that preoccupations with notions of identity and definitions today tend to shift attention away from the internal life of these communities, which still remain the domain of anthropologists. More research on their socio-economic organizations and cultural life are required in order to reconstruct adivasi history. Yet another lacuna in the research conducted so far is that these tend to concentrate on the colonial period because of the easy availability of colonial archives. Yet local sources, regional texts and oral evidence could indeed be utilized to develop an understanding of the pre-colonial situation. The long-term continuities and discontinuities in the story of the adivasi communities is still a field that remains relatively unexplored.

This book deals with different aspects of the histories of adivasi communities of the central part of India, in a belt stretching from Rajasthan in the west, across Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand, to Bengal and Orissa in the east, where about 80 per cent of India's adivasi communities live. It reflects some of the new concerns that have come up in writing the histories of adivasis. The first issue relates to methodology and sources. Most of the histories that have been written are confined to the colonial period, with broad assumptions concerning the pre-colonial past, a bias that has largely arisen due to the relative lack of historical sources relating to the earlier period. In the first essay of this collection, Giorgio Milanetti provides a reading of Tulsidas' *Ramcharitmanas* as a story of the peasantization of adivasi groups and their incorporation and assimilation within the Hindu caste fold, both in north India and in the Gondwana region. The genesis and development of 'tribal' studies in India during the colonial period is analysed by B.B. Chaudhuri in the following essay. He has delineated four genres of colonial writings in course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, namely that of civil and military officers, the works of the 'scholar-administrators' and ethnographers, missionary accounts and the output of professional anthropologists. Each of these genres informed each other and contributed to the making of a 'tribal' identity in colonial India. This has been reiterated by Tripti Chaudhuri in her analysis of the work of the Protestant missions among the Santhals of Chotanagpur. She critiques the notion that missionary activities constituted an imperial strategy, arguing that they were primarily motivated by religious and socio-economic concerns. The essay provides insights into missionary accounts as a source of adivasi history and analyses their role in the adivasi encounter with modernity during the colonial period.

Marco Fattori makes a study of the social and ritual relations between the Rajput ruling dynasties of Dungarpur in southern Rajasthan and the main adivasi groups of the region who are loosely categorized as 'Bhils'. Thus Fattori, like Sundar,[53] inclines to the position that the adivasis were closely integrated within the pre-colonial state structure.[54] Legends and ceremonies associated with the rise of feudatory state, the ancestry of different ruling families of the region, and the status accorded to some of the adivasi groups, all demonstrate that the feudatory rulers

and adivasis did not constitute two separate, autonomous realms as suggested by Subalternist scholars, but were linked together through ritual ties.

The aspect of agrarian change has been discussed by Sanjukta Das Gupta. She argues that the Hos of Singhbhum in the pre-British past had been dependent both on the forest and on cultivation, which had ensured them a minimum livelihood. Under colonial rule their access to nature gradually diminished through the twin governmental policies of expansion of the agrarian frontier and restriction of the forests to the indigenous population, leading to the sedentarization of the adivasis and further contributing towards agrarian expansion in India. This did not, however, benefit the Hos. Instead, agrarian crisis in the region forced them to leave their lands and seek their fortunes elsewhere. In the following essay, Samita Sen traces the factors behind the migration from Chotanagpur and analyses the nature and organization of migration and its impact upon the adivasi village community.

On account of the fact that they are written largely by intelligentsia, using written records that are also created largely by literate officials, histories and social sciences are not always adequately equipped to uncover the silence and anonymous forms of struggle that typify oppressed social groups. Such forms of struggle are informal, often covert, require little or no coordination, or planning and typically avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority: yet they are not devoid of consciousness. Focusing on 'actions between movements', Shashank Sinha attempts to look at the question of women's agency in colonial Chotanagpur. Aiming to shift the focus away from 'extraordinary moments of collective protest' to a 'variety of non-confrontational resistances and contestatory behaviour', this essay explores areas like land rights, witchcraft, employment patterns, etc., to argue that women challenged patriarchy in their everyday lives in 'so many other ways'.

The following two essays look into the aspect of contemporary history. Nandini Sundar argues that when one thinks of adivasis in India at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the first thing that comes to mind is the way that economic processes increasingly see them as irrelevant and denying their very right to exist. What is debatable is how much of this is due to globalization or liberalization, and how much to the mere intensification of processes that have long existed. As historians, framing an event in time, deciding which time to think with is itself a problem. Her essay is an attempt to highlight both continuities and significant differences with the past, in terms of the expropriation of adivasis and their responses in central India. In the final essay in this collection, Daniel Rycroft brings the concepts of subalternity, memory

and visual representation into a new configuration, in order to analyse the relationships between resistance and indigeneity in contemporary India. It moves between the terrains of insurgency, memory-work and indigenous media that have become focal points for studies in post-colonial historiography and visual ethnography and identifies the ways in which the frayed textures of de-colonization are remembered and re-woven, often through contradicting forms of visual and verbal expression, into the cultural politics and minority imaginaries of contemporary India. This essay thus contributes to new debates emerging in both Subaltern studies, on issues of hegemony, counter-hegemony and populist representation, and in indigenous studies, on issues of international visibility and sub-national assertion. Taking its cue from recent ideas generated within visual anthropology on activist aesthetics, it highlights the centrality of 'memory-work' and 'counter-memory' in the construction of radical imageries and epistemologies amongst adivasis in the new state of Jharkhand in eastern India.

In the final essay of this collection, Marine Carrin analyses the performative articulation of adivasi identity, and their devising of a cultural strategy for survival and self-determination through specific forms of ritualized actions which serve as metaphors of identity. Carrin traces the Santhal search for and enactment of 'authentic' 'adivasi' culture, through various kinds of practices and performances. Arguing that some dimensions of displayed indigeneity aim at challenging marginalization by rendering the present meaningful in relation to an idealized past, Carrin interprets the participation to the *Logo Buru* pilgrimage as the possibility to re-enact principles and events deeply embedded in the formation of the state of Jharkhand, created in 2000. The article shows how the performance enables Adivasis to transmute memory work into a powerful trope of political visibility, linking religious and symbolic values which operate at the very local level to the wider agenda of the regional state.

As we argued, the concept of the 'tribe' has been debated upon and reframed since colonial times and we may identify several shifts in historiographical approaches ranging from categorical dismissals as a 'colonial category, ahistorical and sociologically groundless',[55] to the identification of indigenous agency in the production of this category.[56] Attempts to resolve this problem continues today, with the notable passing of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) PESA of 1996, which promised to ensure self-governance through traditional gram sabhas. As Ciocca and Das Gupta have argued, by referring to themselves as first inhabitants, adivasis stress their being not just 'forest dwellers' (*vanvasi*), but as 'national and trans-national subjects who

vindicate a 'border' citizenship distinct from the majoritarian organized forms of social and cultural identities'.[57] The term *adivasi*, specifically coined to indicate the original and autochthonous inhabitants of the subcontinent since pre-Aryan ages, is increasingly acquiring a series of cultural and political meanings all of which tend to discuss, and often disturb, both the logic of liberal nationalist citizenship and more recently also the Indian process of neo-liberal globalization. At the crossroads of postcolonial and subaltern studies, indigenous political theory is indeed fostering new possible subject positions from which to dialogue with social and economic modernity.

Notes

1. For instance, at a time when a section of colonial administrators glorified the Hos as noble savages, other groups, such as the Koravas of south India, the Bhils of western India and the Lodhs of western Midnapore, were classified as 'criminal tribes'. In fact, the idea of the criminal tribe germinated and developed over a long period of time, as Stewart Gordon shows with reference to the Bhils of western India. See Stewart Gordon, 'Bhils and the Idea of a Criminal Tribe in Nineteenth Century India', in Stewart Gordon, *Marathas, Marauders and State Formation in 18th Century India*, New Delhi: OUP, 1994, pp. 151–62.
2. Niharranjan Ray, 'Introductory Address', in *The Tribal Situation in India*, ed. K.S. Singh, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1972, pp. 21–2.
3. Susana B.C. Devalle, *Discourses of Ethnicity: Culture and Protest in Jharkhand*, New Delhi: Sage, 1992, pp. 50, 73.
4. See, for instance, Jagannath Pathy, 'Tribe, Region and Nation in the Context of the Indian State', in *Tribal Communities and Social Change*, ed. P.M. Chacko, Delhi: Sage, 2005. Also see, Sumit Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India, 1201-1991*, Cambridge: CUP, 1999, pp. 2–5. Sudipta Kaviraj argues that in pre-colonial India ethnic communities had 'fuzzy' boundaries which did not admit of discrete divisions. These became 'enumerated' and reified under British rule when the census and other similar institutions reconstituted the meaning of community or ethnicity. Sudipta Kaviraj, 'On the Construction of Colonial Power: Structure, Discourse, Hegemony' (paper presented at the conference 'Imperial Hegemony', Berlin, 1–3 June 1989) cited in Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Governmental Roots of Modern Ethnicity', *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002, p. 87.
5. An instance of such appropriation is the use of the designation *chuar* by which the colonial administration described the rebel adivasis of south-west Bengal during the period 1783–1832. The term was borrowed from the Hindus. *Chuar* in Bengali meant 'wild, ferocious and ill-mannered'.
6. I borrow this concept from B.B. Chaudhuri. See B.B. Chaudhuri, 'The Myth of the Tribe? The Question Reconsidered', *The Calcutta Historical Journal*, vol. 16, no. 1, p. 152.

7. G.S. Ghurye, 'The Aborigines—"So Called" and Their Future', in *Publication No. 11*, Poona: Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, 1943.
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CHAPTER 2

Tulsidas and the Conversion of the Tribals

Notes for a New Reading of the *Ramcharitmanas*

GIORGIO MILANETTI

IT TOOK ME a long time to realize the fact that the *Ramcharitmanas* tells a story of tribes, with tribes, for tribes. More than 20 years ago, I published a study on the celebrated *Gosvami Tulsidas* by Ramchandra Shukla,[1] trying to analyse how this great critic applied his methodology of investigation to one of his favourite authors. Later I once more got interested in the *Ramcharitmanas* while illustrating the contribution of the Italian indologist Luigi Pio Tessitori[2] (1887–1919) to the understanding of its religious message. I have, thereafter, written a few more articles on related issues: about the relation between the poem and the Sanskrit *Ramayana*, about passages dealing with the topics of justice and non-violence, about some poetic ornaments adopted by Tulsidas to describe nature. Only a few years ago, while publishing a study on Indian tribal communities,[3] I combined the previous investigations on the text of the poem with the data I was acquiring from my field and archive research on several groups of the 'tribal belt'.

The results have been encouraging: the history of tribal communities