IMAGINING THE 'OTHER': REPRESENTATIONS OF TRIBAL INDIA IN FICTION WRITTEN IN ENGLISH AND IN TRANSLATION

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This is to certify that I, Anand Mahanand have carried out the research embodied in the present thesis for the full period prescribed under Ph. D. ordinances of the University.

I declare to the best of my knowledge that no part of this thesis was earlier submitted for the award of research degree of any University.

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To the loving memory

of my parents

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Anand Mahanand
Anand Mahanand

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis attempts an exploration of the representations of Tribal India in literature by looking at selected texts from Anglo-Indian fiction, Indian English fiction and Indian fiction in English translation. Using novels and short stories from these categories, the study foregrounds the crucial historico-political contexts which facilitated the construction of images of Tribal India from colonial times to the present. This will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the changing tribal identity over the years and underscore the insights of sociologists by showing a complementary fictional view. It must be admitted that Tribal India is a large subject. Geographical, racial, cultural variations in terms of tribal life and behavior are enormous. We must therefore show enough critical discernment not to homogenize them under an all-purpose "Tribal" entity: whenever we talk of the tribals at the pan-Indian level, we must do so by acknowledging these variations and by, of course, understanding the common elements binding their life and culture, against the background of difference.

Though there exists a large body of creative work about tribal life and culture in India over the centuries, there seems to be inadequate critical literature on the subject. The portrayal of the tribals in fiction has largely been overlooked by critics. One reason for this might be that the critics, mainly from an urban elite background, tended to interest themselves only in exploring broad, pan-Indian subjects and not specific and local variations of culture. Anglo-Indian novelists like Rudyard Kipling, and John

Masters have been examined extensively in terms of large themes like East-West relations and the representation of India.[1] However, the representation of the tribals, which is a local and specific cultural issue in these works, has remained largely unexplored by critics except for a few stray references. Indian English novels such as Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), Manohar Malgonkar's *The Princes* (1963), Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* (1969), Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra* (1993)[2] and Ruskin Bond's short stories also give a glimpse of tribal life, but critics have said little about the tribal motif in these texts. Novels in Indian languages about the tribals have, no doubt, supported critical works in Indian languages like Oriya, Kannada, Bengali, and so on.[3] A few works of these writers have also appeared in English translation. Critical writings on the Oriya novelist Gopinath Mohanty by Sitakant Mahapatra and on the Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are cases in point. Sitakant Mahapatra's *Reaching the Other Shore: The World of Gopinath Mohanty's Fiction* (1992) and Gayatri C. Spivak's article—"Woman in Difference: Mahasweta Devi's Doulati the Bountiful" (1993)—and her introductory essays in *Imaginary Maps* (1995) and *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* (2002) are works that draw our attention. Apart from these, the studies done by researchers like Rajkumar, Ivy Imogene Hansdak and others are worth mentioning.[4]

These studies, however, have limited themselves to the works of the concerned writers. Adequate effort has not been made in putting things into perspective by contextualizing their work in relation to the Anglo-Indian and Indian English writers'

representations of Tribal India. The endeavour in this study, therefore, is to examine selected novels dealing with Tribal India from the colonial period to the present time. This range will help in focusing on the representations of Tribal India at different times from a chronological perspective. Further, the study foregrounds the different points of view of these novelists and shows how these were shaped by an on-going historico-political discourse as discussed by critics like Allen Greenberger and others. The analysis of these texts largely depends on postcolonial theory and theory based on subaltern studies, and attempts to discuss the texts from the subaltern's[5] point of view.

The selection of the texts is not exhaustive. Writers and their texts are selected with a definite purpose. Rudyard Kipling's short stories[6] have been included because he is known as an advocate of colonialism and is quite popular as a writer of colonial India. The rationale for including Verrier Elwin does not require much explanation. Elwin had a long association with Tribal India so much so that he was synonymous with the word 'Tribal India.' He travelled through the tribal regions, and produced not only works on anthropology but also two important novels on the tribals, namely *Phulmat of the Hills* (1937) and *A Cloud That's Dragonish* (1938). The reason for including John Masters is that he has had a long association with India. In fact, his family served India for many generations. Though the tribals constitute only the backdrop in his novel, *To the Coral Strand* (1962), it reflects his perceptions of the tribal people.

Inclusion of an Anglo-Indian woman writer would have made the chapter more representative. However, since no text by such a writer on tribal India is available, it has

not been done. Nevertheless, in the following chapters on Indian English novels and Indian novels in translation, an attempt has been made to strike a balance by including texts by women writers along with texts by male writers. In the rest of the chapters also availability of the English translations of the texts and the writers' engagement with the tribal people have been the criteria for selection. Other texts on the theme[7] could also have been included, but due to my need to focus sharply and the scope of my work being narrow, I could not take these up. Hence only a few novels and stories have been selected as samples, but these other works have been referred to as the contexts arose. My study, therefore, is by no means exhaustive but it has the merit of close and particular analysis of specific texts, and by a process of extrapolation, larger conclusions could be drawn.

A word may be said about the use of the term tribal. One is aware that the term has a negative connotation as it has been designated by the British and a brief history of it has been given in the second chapter. It has been used hesitantly as short hand for the sake of clarity and easy communication. For convenience the word 'tribal' is used for the Scheduled Tribes and members of Denotified Nomadic communities. G. N. Devy in his *Painted Words: An Anthology of Tribal Literature* (2002) uses the term for the same communities. Regarding this issue he points out: "Given the difficulty of defining tribal identity we are forced to fall back on the official listings that make up the Scheduled Tribes and enumerate the Denotified and Nomadic communities"(Devy ix). In this dissertation too, the term 'tribal people' includes the Scheduled Tribes, and the Denotified and Nomadic communities as used by G.N.Devy. The documentation in the

dissertation closely follows the fifth edition of *MLA Handbook for Writing Research Papers* (2001).

This study consists of eight chapters. The **first Chapter (Introduction)** outlines the aim, scope, significance, and approach of the thesis. It is followed by the **second Chapter,** which includes a general profile of Tribal India. It also examines some important questions relating to tribals such as: Who is a tribal? How and why were tribals notified as tribes? What were the implications of this classification? It is also to be noted that even before the formal notification, dominant categories in Indian society had contributed to the marginalisation of tribal cultures. Terms like 'tribe,' 'indigenous people,' 'adivasis' and their implications have been explained so as to allow us to arrive at an understanding of the politics of representation. The insights from anthropological works like K.S. Singh's *The Tribal Situation in India* (1972), L.P. Vidyarthi and V.K. Ray's *Tribal Culture in India* (1972) and M.N. Srinivas' *The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization and Other Essays* (1989) have been used to put together such a background. An exploration of the Indo-British connection in general has been made to locate these novels in the larger discourse of Anglo-Indian fiction. Bhupal Singh's *A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction* (1934), Allen Greenberger's *The British Image of India: A Study in the Literature of Imperialism 1880-1960* (1969), Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) have been useful in this respect.

This profile of Tribal India provides a perspective through which subsequent chapters of the study can analyse specific examples of Anglo-Indian, Indian English and

Indian novels and short fiction in English translation concerning Tribal India. In chronological order, it seeks to highlight important motifs, symbols, ideas and themes in this writing. Employing a diachronic mode of analysis, an attempt has been made to trace the shifts in attitudes and modes of perception of Tribal India. The pattern in these chapters comprise invariably a general outline of the relevant context, a brief survey of the particular writer and his/her background and sharp focus on the selected texts, while highlighting specific features particular to the texts.

Following this pattern, the **third chapter** surveys Anglo-Indian novels about Tribal India. Rudyard Kipling's short stories, Verrier Elwin's novels, *Phulmat of the Hills* (1937) and *A Cloud That's Dragonish* (1938), and John Masters' novel, *To the Coral Strand* (1962), have been discussed. In these novels and short stories the writers show the tribals as 'the ethnic other,' at times as 'barbarous' in relation to the dominant classes of society, and assume that British rule was meant to improve the lot of these people. The chapter also explores the patronizing and imperialist attitudes of these writers. Masters' protagonists demonstrate their superiority to the tribals who are shown as living in remote and deep jungles and as carrying on their old ways of life in an unchanging way. Another way of looking at the tribals has been to romanticise them. The chapter therefore discusses Masters' 'romantic' view of the tribals and his description of their physical features, which betrays his voyeuristic technique of dwelling on the seamier aspects of tribal life, in particular of tribal women. This is a variation of the male, and in this case, western 'gaze.' This exoticism is meant to entice western lovers of the antique. Verrier Elwin's celebration of the tribal woman Phulmat's beauty in his novel

Phulmat of the Hills is an obvious example of this. This example is particularly noteworthy, considering his otherwise 'inward' explorations of Tribal India in his scholarly work. The chapter shows that the writers' ideas about the tribals were also shaped by anthropological findings. "Anthropology" as K.S. Singh reiterates "is the child of colonization" (Singh, "Colonialism" 399). The novelists are also not free from colonial bias. In this connection, the chapter also reflects on the ideas of the anthropologists regarding tribal culture in relation to literary representations of the tribals.

The **fourth chapter** looks at Indian English novels like Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* (1969), Manohar Malgonkar's *The Princes* (1963), Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra* (1993), and at short stories by Ruskin Bond. These writers deal with the life of the tribes living in different parts of India. The chapter shows that even in the case of Indian English writers, tribals have been romanticized. They are also perceived as 'loyal' and 'devoted' people, a stereotype about the tribals that is cherished by the urban elites—a class to which many of the Indian English writers themselves belong. Their writings conceptualise tribals as people living in a peaceful and undisturbed environment, untouched by and cut off from the rest of the country.

The **fifth chapter** discusses Gopinath Mohanty's novels, *Dadibudha* (1944) or *The Ancestor*, and *Paraja* (1946) (both in English translation), and other novels by him (in Oriya), and highlights his concern for the primitive world of the tribals which is affected by modernization. Since Mohanty's other three novels—*Amrutara Santana*

(1947), *Siba Bhai*(1955) and *Apahancha* (1961)—have not been translated into English, I have translated the relevant passages and quoted them to substantiate my arguments. The chapter focuses on the issue of why the Indian writers were concerned with the modernization of tribal life. It also takes into consideration debates as to whether the tribal should adopt modernization or live in the primitive mode of life.

K. Shivarama Karanth's *Kudiyara Kusu* (1951), rendered into English as *Headman of the Little Hill*, is also discussed in this light in the **sixth chapter** because the novel dwells on the Kudias, a small hill tribe living in the Western Ghats, and on the way they have been affected by the outside world represented by the moneylenders and missionaries. In his Preface to the novel, Karanth explains his urge for writing this book on the tribals. He points out that what made him write his novel "were the social problems they [the Kudiya tribes] faced and the outside interference which they could no longer withstand" (vi). This chapter also throws light on the attitude of these writers to the tribals and their life. An attempt is made to relate these novels to those by Masters and Elwin. This shows that the colonial writers either exoticize them because they find tribal culture to be quite different from their own, or sometimes they look at the tribals with contempt. However, the Indian writers, because of intermixing with tribal culture and because they are motivated by reforming attitudes, do not find the tribals to be exotic, nor do they look at them with contempt. Instead, they want the tribals to improve their standards of living without compromising their traditional values and institutions.

The **seventh chapter** examines Mahasweta Devi's novels and short stories and makes an attempt to trace her attitude to the issues raised earlier. The chapter shows that unlike the above-mentioned novelists, she does not romanticise or idealise the tribals but presents them in their raw humanity or in what Said would call "brute reality." Her short stories, "Draupadi," "The Hunt," "Salt," "Arjun," and "Shishu," and her novel *Operation Bashai Tudu* (1978), are but a few examples of her method of exposing sexual and class exploitation. Three of her novels, *Sal Girar Dake* (1984) or *In the Name of Birthday*, *Chotti Munda ebang Tar Tir* (1980) or *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* and *Aranyer Adhikar* (1977) or *Rights of the Forests,* portray tribal revolts, and shows her attempts to highlight tribal history. Of these, *Sal Girar Dake* and *Aranyer Adhikar* have not yet been translated into English. Therefore, I have used the Hindi translation of *Sal Girar Dake* and the Oriya translation of *Aranyer Adhikar* and translated the quotes into English. Mahasweta Devi's "Pterodactyl, Pirtha and Puran Sahay" (1955) makes an attempt to revive the tribal myth and gives evidence of the advanced cultural heritage of the tribals. The chapter also explores the relationship between the tribals and mainstream society in post-Independent India. In this context it reflects on the change of attitude towards the tribals and their identity in the modern Indian Welfare State.

The **eighth chapter** is the Conclusion. It sums up the main arguments of the study, highlighting the difference in the representation of Tribal India in Anglo-Indian, Indian English and Indian fiction in English translation. It suggests that different writers depict the tribals as barbaric, exotic, romantic and human. It suggests that the Anglo-Indian writers had a very specific imperative of unravelling the Orient and therefore, they

focused only on limited aspects of the tribal reality. The economic exploitation of the tribals by the British and tribal resistance movements found no expression in their novels. The study makes a case for the significance of Indian writers in Indian languages available to us through English translations who highlight the tribal problem. A thorough sense of the historical interchanges and intermixing between Tribal India and mainstream Indian society and their relationships through the ages is one factor that might account for their more satisfying work. While not entirely shunning the position of 'the other', they are strongly conscious of the bonds of interaction. Just as for the colonial writers, for the Indian writers also, the tribals are the ethnic other. It is for this reason that the thesis has been titled *–Imagining the 'Other.'* The study also takes into account the difference in points of view among Indian writers like Gopinath Mohanty, Shivarama Karanth and Mahasweta Devi on the tribals, and suggests that their perceptions overlap. The study tentatively concludes by suggesting that the representations of all these writers provide a near comprehensive understanding of Tribal India from the colonial period to the present time. It argues that the authenticity of these representations needs to be tested by comparing them with tribal writings expressing the tribal experience coming from tribals themselves—much of this material is in the oral form and is only now being gathered and preserved by scholars like G.N. Devy and B. K. Tripathy[8]. Since not much of the latter is available in English translation, the study does not dwell much on it and to that extent the study is a pointer to future possibilities. Nevertheless, an attempt has been made to characterize the tribal writings emerging at present and available so far, and to juxtapose them in relation to their (non-tribal) predecessors. This has been done not to refute the representation of tribals by non-tribal writers but to understand the perceptions about

Tribal India through the centuries. This analysis will hopefully open up new perspectives on the study of fiction on Tribal India written in English and in translations about Tribal India. Above all, it will be an advance on the criticism available so far on the subject. It is hoped that the study will stimulate further work in these areas in future.

Notes

[1]Moore-Gilbert's book *Kipling and Orientalism* (1986) discusses Kipling's work in relation to power. N. S. Pradhan in his essay "John Masters' India" (1981) sums up the novels of John Masters and examines Masters' representation of India.

[2]These texts are cited according to their importance in their treatment of the theme of Tribal India and not on the basis of chronology (year of publication).

[3]Hadibandhu Mirdha's Ph.D. thesis in Oriya, *Odiya Upanyasare Adibasi Jeebana Chitra* (*The Portrayal of Tribal Life in Oriya Novel*) (1990), discusses ten Oriya novels including those of Gopinath Mohanty.

[4]Rajkumar has also studied Mohanty's *Paraja* as a text of ethnic exploitation in his M.Phil. dissertation titled *Forms of Oppression: Caste, Class and Ethnicity* (1993). Critics have not adequately explored K. Shivarama Karanth's *Headman of the Little Hill* though his other major novels have been examined extensively. Mahasweta Devi's fiction and short stories however, have been discussed by a number of critics, the important one being Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. She has directed discussions from feminist, poststructuralist and historical perspectives

revolving around the tribal theme. Ivy Hansdak in her M.Phil. dissertation titled *The Tribal as the 'Primitive' Other in Indian Literature: A Study of Three Texts* (1996) analyses one novel each by Gopinath Mohanty, Arun Joshi and Mahasweta Devi. However, her dissertation limits itself to the study of only three novels.

[5]This term is derived by Ranajit Guha from Antonio Gramsci's writing "implying non-elite or subordinated social groups"(qtd. in Patil 200).

[6]Kipling's stories have been taken from *Kipling's India*, ed. Khushwant Singh, *The Jungle Book* and *The Second Jungle Book*.

[7]A number of texts on the same theme such as Birendra Bhattacharyya's Assamese novel *Yaruingam* (1960), Pratibha Ray's Oriya novel *Adibhumi* (1993) or *The Primal Land*, Bibhuti Bhushan Bandhopadyaya's Bangla novel *Aaranyak* (1939) or *Of the Forest* are available.

[8]G.N.Devy's *Painted Words: An Anthology of Tribal Literature* is a unique collection of tribal literature. Devy is also engaged in collection, translation and documentation of tribal narratives. B. K. Tripathy is in the process of documenting oral narratives of different tribal communities of Orissa.

Chapter 2

Tribe, Tribal India, Tribal History

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to present a general profile of Tribal India. The chapter begins with the concept of 'tribe' and shows how it has undergone changes through the ages and then it gives an outline history of Tribal India.

Tribal peoples form a major segment of the world population. They are found all over the world. They are called by different names such as 'primitive,' 'tribal,' 'indigenous,' 'aboriginal,' 'native,' and so on. India has a large number of tribal people. According to R. C. Verma they "constitute about 8.08% of the total population. They would be about 6.78 crores out of the total population of 83.86 crores according to [the] 1991 census" (i). The major tribes in India are the Gonds, the Bhils, the Santals, the Oraons and the Minas. They live in different regions in the forest as well as in urban areas, and mostly speak their own languages. The states of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Maharastra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and the Northeastern Region have a larger concentration of tribal population. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are also inhabited by several tribes such as the Great Andamanese, Sentenelese, Onges, Jarwas, Sompens, and so on.

The tribes, according to Verma, are "the autochthonous people of the land who are believed to be the earliest settlers in Indian Peninsula" (1). They are called

Adivasis, meaning the first settlers. Prior to the caste system, people were divided into different tribes. At that time, each tribe was a homogenous and self-contained unit without any hierarchical discrimination. Each tribe had a chief for its protection. Gradually, the chief assumed political and military power and was recognized as the ruler. Thus, there emerged the republics and monarchies. Tribes were associated with large kingdoms. Each tribe had its own system of administration. There was decentralization of authority among the tribes. The traditional tribal institutions were vested with legislative, judicial and executive powers. The 'Maniki' and 'Munda' system in Singhbhum and the 'Manjhi' system in Santal Pargana are examples of tribal institutions. As pointed out by R.C.Verma these "are headed by tribal chiefs who exercise considerable influence over social, economic and religious affairs of their respective tribes"(1).

According to *The Oxford English Dictionary* the word 'tribe' is derived from the Latin term '*tribus*' which was applied to the three divisions of the early people of Rome. The term however has gone through a lot of changes. It meant a political unit consisting of a number of clans. A tribe occupied a definite geographical area. Permanent settlement gave a geographical identity to a tribe. For that reason, tribes were often named after the area. Our country is named after a tribe called 'Bharata.' Even today states like Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura are named after the Mizo, Naga and Tripuri tribes respectively.

With the growth of nationalism in Europe, the term 'tribe' came to denote a race of people living within a given territory. Western writers in India known as Orientalists followed by anthropologists and sociologists[1] used this term with the same connotation and argued that the tribes of India belonged to three stocks—the Negritos, the Mongoloids and the Mediterranean. The Negritos are believed to be the earliest inhabitants of the Indian Peninsula, but they have almost disappeared. Some believe that they are still found among the tribals of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, known as the Onges, the Great Andamanese, the Sentinelese and the Peniyans. The Mongoloid race is represented by the tribal people in the sub-Himalayan region. They may be divided into two categories, namely the Palaeo Mongoloids and the Tibeto Mongoloids. The Palaeo Mongoloids are represented by the tribes living in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur. The Tibeto Mongoloids are represented by the tribals living in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. They are believed to have migrated from Tibet. The Mediterranean people form a bulk of the tribal population and are generally known as the Dravidians. Verma says: "Dravidians are again divided into two parts [groups]—Kolarians who speak a dialect called Mundari, and the Dravidians proper" (3). It is believed that with the advent of the Aryans, there was a protracted struggle between the Aryans and the Dravidians, then referred to as the 'Dasyus.' The conquered Dravidians were reduced to a servile status and regarded as 'Sudras.' A section of the Dravidians who escaped defeat and did not surrender to the Aryans continued to maintain their independent existence in the remote hills and forests. They are believed to be "the forerunners of the various tribes in India"(3). This has been

discussed in detail in the following section, which attempts to present a tribal history.

Tribals have a long and rich cultural past. Their history goes back to the pre-historic period. Unfortunately, because they lack a written tradition, it is difficult for historians and anthropologists to chronicle their past. It is said that even the subsequent history of the tribals upto the Aryan invasion is shrouded in obscurity. Some stone implements of prehistoric man have been discovered. However, there has been no discovery of skeletons of the people who used these implements. By studying the human fossils anthropologists are not able to conclude whether India had a prehistoric period. However, according to Nadeem Hasnain: "it has now become an established fact that the aboriginal tribes in India are, in most cases, survivals from the later prehistoric groups" (23). The Aborigines of India do not form a uniform race. They come from various regions of Asia and they belong to various races, as mentioned earlier.

Our knowledge about the origin and subsequent history of the numerous tribes is vague. However, their story of glory and decline can be reconstructed. The invention of script and the commencement of written records are helpful in this regard. Some scholars believe that the builders of the Indus valley civilization might have been the aboriginal people. Their extinction is attributed to the disastrous alteration of the course of the Indus river resulting in destructive flooding of settlements and silting of fields. Another explanation put forward by Stephen Fuchs is that "the Aryan invaders might have destroyed the centres of Harrappan

civilization and killed or dispersed its population. The discovery of unburied skeletons on the steps of a building in Mohenjodaro seems to support such an assumption" (qtd. in Hasnain 8). There is scanty information about the people who were destroyed. It is also not clear from the archaeological excavations whether they spoke Dravidian languages.

The ancient scriptures of the Vedic period contain some references to the tribals. The Vedic period witnessed the pouring in of the Aryans from the Northwestern parts of India and their fighting against the non-Aryans. We read in these scriptures that the God Indra was invoked to smash the forts of the 'Dasyus.' He is described as casting his dart on the 'Dasyus' to establish Aryan supremacy. He is described as having killed both the 'Dasyus' and the 'Samyus.' Goddess Saraswati is again credited with having killed the Parvatas, a hostile tribe who dwelt on the banks of the Paushni. We are told that Vishnu conquered the bull-jawed Dasyus in his battles and together with Indra destroyed Sambara's cattles. As Hasnain says: "The Asuras who captured the city of an Aryan sage Dabhiti were defeated by Indra and dispossessed of their booty"(25).

In the later Vedic period (1000 to 600 BC), the fusion of the Aryan and the non-Aryan continued: "The process of Aryanisation of the tribals and tribalization of the Aryans was on" (Kosambi 27). The two epics *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* refer to the tribals as 'Sudras,' 'Ahiras,' 'Dravidas,' 'Pulindas' and 'Sabaras' or' Saoras.' ' Sabari,' who was a tribal woman, is shown in the *Ramayana*

as having offered fruits to Rama. In the *Mahabharata*, Ekalavya, who was a Bhil boy, had to offer his thumb to Dronacharya as the fee for having secretly watched and learnt the arts of war from Dronacharya while the latter was teaching the Kaurava and the Pandava princes. The *Mahabharata* contains many such references to the tribals. The Mundas and the Nagas claimed to have fought on the side of the Kurus against the Pandavas. Bhima's son Ghatotkacha who showed his valour in the war, was born of his tribal wife. Arjuna married Chitrangada, a Naga princess.

During the earliest phase of the historical period, small tribal pockets were subjugated by invaders. Ajatasatru destroyed the tribal republic of Vaisali. Alexander wiped out tribal pockets on the Northwestern border. Texts such as *the Dharma Sutra* (600 to 300 BC) and *Manusmriti* (200 BC to 200 AD) mention the old process of fusion and assimilation of the tribes. These so-called mixed castes were the supposed progeny of miscegenation between the male of one caste/tribe begotten of the woman of another caste. The 'Nishadas' in these texts are cited as an example. Hasnain says: "The Chandalas, a tribe, were absorbed into Hindu society and assigned the task of removing dead bodies of animals and human beings as also whipping and chopping off the limbs of criminals" (27). Thus the process of downgrading of the tribals continued. The tribes in this process of assimilation started being assigned tasks of the lower order, which might have gradually led to the creation of the lower caste referred to as 'Sudra.'

The tribes however, did not lead an isolated life. As Hasnain points out, their participation in sub-Puranic and epic traditions of myths and folktales gives evidence that they were not an isolated lot. One can see the impact of epic heroes/heroines such as Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Ravana, Bhima, etc., on some of the tribes in central India in their myths and lore. The present day Gonds call themselves children of Ravana. In the same way, ancient Sanskrit literary works such as *Panchatantra*, *Kathasarita Sagara*, *Vishnu Purana*, *Kadambari,* and *Harsha-Charita* give descriptions of the tribals which clearly show interaction between the tribal and the non-tribal traditions.

During the feudal period (400-1000 AD), the tribal areas were invaded by the non-tribals. During this period, the process of Sanskritization affected the tribal chiefs. The Brahmin priests prepared suitable genealogies for themselves and the ruling Brahmin class spearheaded the process of Sanskritization as expressed and popularized by M. N. Srinivas. Srinivas says: "Sanskritization may be briefly defined as the process by which a low caste or tribe or other group takes over the customs, rituals, beliefs, ideology, and style of life of a high and, in particular, a twice-born (*dwija*) caste. The Sanskritization of a group has usually the effect of improving its position in the local caste hierachy. It normally presupposes either an improvement in the economic or political position of the group concerned, or a higher group self-consciousness resulting from its contact with a source of the 'Great Tradition' of Hinduism such as a pilgrim centre or a monastery or a

proselytizing sect." (*The Cohesive Role* 56-57). As Virginous Xaxa points out: "Though M.N. Srinivas had the so-called lower class in mind when he coined this term, it can be extended to the tribals as well. This process of social change is also termed as "Hinduization"(Xaxa 1519).

With the advent of Muslim invaders in the11th and 12th centuries, some Rajputs who did not submit to the invaders penetrated into tribal areas and established their rule, replacing the tribal chiefs. Thus, the Parmar Rajputs expelled the Cheros from Shahabad, and the Chandels replaced the Bhuinya in the South Monghyr district of Bihar.

During the Moghul rule (12-18th century), the tribal chiefs and the Hindu rulers in tribal areas of Central India and Bihar were forced to show their allegiance to the Turko-Afghan and Mughal rulers. In 1585 and 1616 A.D., the Moghul Muslim army marched into Chotanagpur and defeated the Raja of Khukra. Similarly, the tribal areas of Assam were also subjugated by another Muslim general.

During this period, a number of tribes were converted into Islam in the Northwest frontier region. The Gond dynasty which had its 'Garha' near Jabalpur and ruled the region for more than two hundred years also faced defeat at the hands of the Muslim and Maratha rulers. The loss of their power compelled the tribes to convert to Islam, but some of them still retained their identity. The Muslims of the

Lakshadweep Islands and the Siddi Muslims of Gujarat are the best examples of such conversion. R. C. Verma points out that "when the Moghuls invaded South India, they forced the Banjaras, an enterprising tribe of Northwestern India to employ their cattle for transporting their supplies. That is how the Banjaras migrated to Andhra Pradesh and other adjoining areas in the South"(4). However, the oral narratives of the Banjaras offer very different reasons for their migration. M. Gona Naik in his book in Telugu: *Sugali Samskruthi Bhasha Saahityalu* records this fact.[2]

Some Muslim saints worked and preached among tribal people. Pir Syed Shah Kamal and Pir Syed Mohammed worked among the Nats and the Kols respectively. The tribals were also influenced by some streams of the Bhakti Movement. Some became followers of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu when they came in contact with him during his travels. The Bhuiyans of Jharkhand, for example, completely gave up their tribal traits and became Hindus. Tribal authority was substantially eroded by these interactions. The economic base of tribal societies withered under the Zamindari and other colonial systems of administration that came into force after these contacts and assimilations.

Apart from the Moghuls, the other groups who disturbed the tribal regions were the Persians, the Greeks, the Sakas, the Huns and other hordes of nomadic invaders who came periodically from the Northwest.

With the advent of the East India Company, the British penetrated into tribal regions. They used forest produces for their business. Ramachandara Guha and Madhav Gadgil in their essay "State Forestry and Conflict in British India" (1989) show how the British used forests for commercial exploitation. Trees were cut down for timber. Forestland was used for tea, rubber and coffee plantations. Train lines and roads were built in forest areas. Routes from forest to sea coasts were built to transport goods. In another article entitled "The Making of the 1878 Forest Act" Guha points out the following:

> The early years of the expansion of the railway network, c. 1853 onwards, led to tremendous deforestation in peninsular India owing to the railways' requirements of fuel wood and construction timber. Huge quantities of durable timber were also needed for use as sleepers across the newly laid tracks. (66)

The Grand Trunk Road, which was built through tribal labour, helped in business, and there was an inflow of outsiders adding to the population. The so-called outsiders dominated the tribals in many ways. Most of the tribal families lost their agricultural lands and lived in a state of starvation. The tribals were also victims of a host of middlemen who operated between the new rulers and the tribals. Among the outsiders, there were merchants and moneylenders who exploited the tribals in different ways. The stories and novels of Gopinath Mohanty and Mahasweta Devi give us a glimpse of the nature of tribal exploitation, though they were written in

recent years. It is worth quoting an example from Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja* (1946) where he shows how the outsiders deceive the tribals:

> A tribesman comes to the Sahukar for a loan of *mandia*, and the Sahukar agreed to let him have it. The deal is closed and, as the man is about to go, the Sahukar asks him: 'Have you taken your grain?'
>
> 'Yes, Sahukar,' the man says.
>
> 'How much are you taking?,' the Sahukar asks again.
>
> *'One Putti'*
>
> 'All right . Now go and tell my clerk that you are taking a putti of *mandia*. He will write it down in his books.'
>
> The loan is entered in the clerk's ledger.
>
> 'Have you informed my clerk?', the Sahukar asks again.
>
> 'Yes, Sahukar.' The man prepares to leave.
>
> 'Wait,' the Sahukar says, 'You haven't informed my wife. She is inside the house. Go and tell her. And tell my servant also.'
>
> The poor Kondh or Paraja has to inform three other persons, besides the Sahukar himself, that he is borrowing a *putti* of *mandia,* with a fifty per cent interest.
>
> And each time one entry is made.
>
> Next year, the borrower returns with a putti and a half of *mandia*, which should clear him of the debt.
>
> 'Is that all?' the Sahukar asks, looking at the pile of the grain.

'Why, Yes, Sahukar. I took one putti from you, and the interest is half a putti.'

'One putti! Are you mad? You took one putti from me, one putti from my clerk, one putti from my wife, and one putti from my servant. How many puttis is that?

There, count: one and one and one and one makes four. And the interest of four puttis ? Two puttis. So you should have brought six puttis in all; instead of which you have brought only one and a half. Why, even the interest is more than that! Do you understand?'

'No, *Sahukar*,' the bewildered tribesman says.

'But you must be right'.

And the poor man is hooked. A 'goti' is born. (Mohanty 121-122)

This passage is indicative of the cunning with which the outsiders grabbed tribal land and property. This led the tribals into lives of misery and deprivation. The penetration of the outsiders had cultural implications as well. When tribals came into contact with the non-tribals, they internalized new cultural elements mostly of the higher caste at the expense of their indigenous culture. This process is very close to the processes described by M.N. Srinivas in his thesis on Sanskritization. The term has just been explained in the early part of this chapter.

The Christian missionaries also came in with the patronage of the government. They spread Christianity among the tribals, and helped them with health care and education. Christianity preached less complicated beliefs and rituals

and egalitarian principles as opposed to the caste-ridden Hindu society. It did not appeal to the tribals immediately but slowly they embraced it. After the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857, Christianity got official patronage and spread speedily among the tribals. Joseph Bara who has made a case study concerning this issue with reference to the tribals of Chotanagpur region rightly points out that the Mutiny of 1857 temporarily jolted the official zeal. The specific tribal situation of Chotanagpur made the colonial rulers give the missionaries a signal to go ahead in full swing. This was part of a mission to civilize the most backward populations where the missionaries would prove expedient. Bara gives an instance of how a government official supported the missionary activity. For instance, as Bara points out:

> [...] Chotanagpur had an extraordinarily zealous official in E .T. Dalton (first as deputy commissioner of Ranchi and then as commissioner of Chotanagpur from 1857 to 1875) at Ranchi. Having realised the need of special treatment of the tribals in the scheme of colonial 'civilisation', Dalton acted as a patron of the mundas and the oraons, and western education was one of his priorities.... Soon he found in the Christian missionaries, who were fast expanding their operation, a good companion which effectively meant placing the colonial government's educational responsibility on the missionary's shoulder. Thus, the western education and the Christian missionaries became a single vehicle as far as the tribals were concerned. (786)

Mahasweta Devi's novels, which are concerned with tribal history, capture this episode quite realistically. This aspect will be discussed in detail when we analyse her novels in chapter seven.

The missionaries, with the patronage of the government, spread Christianity among the tribals and helped them with health care and education. Unlike Hinduism and Islam, Christianity spread widely in the tribal regions with the patronage of the British government and established a firm footing there. The result was a feeling of discontent and unrest among the tribals. At this stage, a number of movements took place, which raised protesting voices against the oppression and exploitation by landlords and British rulers who in general, stood by the side of the landlords. Notable among them are the Kherwar movement (1871-80), the Birsa Munda Movement (1874-1901), the Bhil Rebellion (1879-80), the Sardari Movement (1881-95), the Bastar Uprising (1910-11), and the Tana Bhagat Movement (1920-35). Mahasweta Devi records some of these movements in her novels—which are discussed in chapter seven. However, it is useful to discuss some of these movements in detail here. The Santhal Insurrection took place as a reaction to the atrocities of the outsiders. The non-Santhals who resided in this area got tribal land through some deal, and the tribals had to pay rent to the Hindu chiefs. In the beginning, the Santhals did not pay rent to the Hindu chiefs, but due to penetration of their regions by outsiders, they began losing their lands. Initially, the Santals did not pay much attention to the 'dikus' (aliens), but when their traditional economy began to be shattered, they stood against the administrator and the landlord. Around

1885, the Santal Insurrection, which was locally called 'Santhal hul,' broke out. But it was put down by the British troops. Specific reform measures were introduced in the Damin-i-koh and other crucial parts. More powers were given to the administrators over tribal land alienation and indebtedness issues. The old regulations in force in the plains of Bengal were no longer operative in the Santhal Parganas.

The new regulations that were imposed upon the Santhals meant that the authority of their headmen was eroded, and that the Dikus did pretty much what they liked. They frequently increased rents on land holdings without any notice or consultation. With the new judicial system, the Santals were reduced to the status of serfs. They started their protest in 1871. Two Santal brothers, Sido and Kanhu, came to the forefront providing leadership for mass uprisings. Their objective was clearly stated: "we should slay all the *Dikus* (aliens) and become rulers of ourselves... We should only pay eight annas (fifty paise) for a buffalo plough and four annas for a bullock plough, and if the rulers (both British and Indian aliens) did not agree we should start fighting..." (qtd. in Srivastava 13).

Another tribal movement which gained much popularity among the tribals was the Birsa Munda Movement (1874-1901). Ranchi and the Santhal Parganas were in the grip of exploitation in the closing years of the nineteenth century. The domination of the 'dikus' still continued. Around that time the Christian missionaries were also active in this region. There was a feeling of discontent and

unrest among the tribals. At this stage Birsa, a Munda youth, organized his people to raise their voice against the oppression and exploitation by the landlords and the Britsh rulers. Today the Munda and other tribes of the Ranchi district hail Birsa as their God. They call him Birsa Bhagwan. Mahasweta Devi's novel, *Aranyer Adhikar*, is based on this movement. Like the Mundas, the Oraons of this region also launched a powerful movement known as the Tana Bhagat Movement. The Oraons had seen oppression and deprivation at the hands of the local Zamindars and policemen. Jatra Bhagat, an Oraon, proclaimed that he had a vision of Dharmu or God. He had received a revelation for the other fellow Oraons. His message swept over the country, and people from far and near began to come for his darshan. His followers gave up worshipping spirits (ghosts) and stopped animal sacrifice. People gave up non-vegetarian food, wine, tobacco and group songs and dances. They were asked not to pay rent to the Zamindars and not to work for the aliens. Jatra warned his people in strong words that if they did not obey his orders they would soon perish. Acting upon Jatras's advice people began refusing to work for the landlords and disobeyed rules and regulations imposed by the British rulers who in turn issued orders for the arrest of Jatra and his close disciples. Jatra was imprisoned. After completing his term in jail, Jatra lived for a short period. The followers of Jatra are called 'Tana Bhagats' because 'tana' means pulling together. Jatra was trying to pull together all Oraons into his fold. Apart from these movements in the Chotanagpur regions, uprisings also took place in other parts as well. The Bastar Uprisings that took place in Central India in 1910-11 is such an example. The monopoly of the outsiders has been cited as the main reason for this uprising. K. S.

Singh quotes a letter sent by B. P Standant, Chief Secretary and the Commisioner for the Central Provinces to the Secretary to the Government of India, Forest Department, Shimla. The letter cites the following reasons:

> [...] the inclusion in reserves of forest and village lands, highhanded treatment and unjust exactions on the part of Forest Officials, maltreatment of pupils and parents by school masters in order to extort money, forcible collection by school masters of money to purchase supplies for Tahsildar and Inspector, purchase by school masters of supplies at one-fourth of the market price, similar acts by the State Police, with the addition that they exact *begar* and beat village servants to compel the cheap supply of grain, the demand of excessive *begar* by the Tahsildar and non-payment for supplies in connection with the camps of officials, the exaction of excessive *begar* by Malgujars, interference with the rights of manufacturing intoxicating liquor, a practice of officials of getting houses built by *begar,* even compelling the labourers to feed themselves, exactions by the lessees of villages... and general oppression on the part of officials. The petitioners add that this oppression began with the advent of Rai Bahadur Panda Baijnath, that they had petitioned him without result, and that their present object was merely to ensure that some one should come and hear them. (qtd. in Singh, *Tribal Situations* 178-179)

Singh further says:

> It was a total revolt. The outburst was accompanied by murder, arson, looting and general savagery, it was a regular revolt against civilization, against schools, against forest conservancy, against the opening up of the country by Hindu settlers, in short it was a movement of Bastar state for Bastar forest dwellers.(179)

It was during the colonial period that the tribals were studied by scholars and designated as 'tribals.' A number of administrators and anthropologists who were engaged in studying the tribes provided classified information about the tribals and their population. In the Census Report of 1891, V.A. Bains, the Commissioner of Census, classified the castes according to their traditional occupations. As Verma records: "Under the category of Agricultural and Pastoral castes; he formed a sub-heading called 'Forest Tribes.' In the Census Report of 1901, they were classified as 'Animists' and in 1911 as 'tribal animists' or people following tribal religion" (5). In the Census Report of 1921, they were specified as 'Hill and Forest Tribes' and in the 1931 census they are described as Primitive Tribes. The Government of India Act specified them as Backward Tribes. However, the Census Report of 1941 classified them as 'Tribes' only. Thus, the term 'tribe' was designated by the British for these people. In an essay entitled "The Idea of Tribe in the Indian Scene" Jagannath Pathy explores the origin and politics of using the term. He states that before India was colonized, there was no equivalent indigenous word for the English term 'tribe'. The Sanskrit word *atavika jana* simply denoted an

agglomeration of individuals with specific territorial kinship and a cultural pattern. The so-called tribes were called nations and people. The so-called tribals called themselves people and others as outsiders. It was used to dominate and oppress the peoples and nations. Another term 'noble savage' was coined to divide the struggling people. The word indicates economic and political relations between the so-called tribal and the civilized capitalist world. It also denotes a special kind of social origin and a stage of evolution in human history. During the colonial expansion, the British faced opposition from non-Aryan and non-Muslim people. At that time "tribals were characterized as food gathering communities and animists and shifting cultivators were added to the list of tribes" (Pathy 347). This is how the term came into existence. Even the classification is arbitrary. It is pertinent here to mention that the line between the tribe and caste is very arbitrary. For people who are classified as tribe in one region are known by caste in other regions.

It is worth mentioning the major debates that concern tribal development. K.S. Singh foregrounds the nature of the studies done by the British in this regard. He states:

> The ethnographers took a placid and synchronic view of tribal society. Their view was inspired by the then model in anthropology. Tribal communities were treated as isolates, tribals as Noble Savages, and their primitive condition was described as a state of Arcadian simplicity. (Singh, "Colonialism" 400)

The anthropologists looked at the Sanskritization of tribal chiefs in negative terms and held the view that it was not good for the tribals. They also rationalized and justified the British rule. The administrators however, took a diachronic view of the tribal society and described the pattern of changes in the agrarian system, which suggested that primitive people were not immune to the impact of colonialism. There was a proposal by two administrator-anthropologists, J.P. Mills and G.H Hutton to keep the tribal areas under the direct control of British administration (Singh 1984: 405)[3]. The nationalists, on the other hand, expressed their apprehension saying that the new constitution of fully excluded areas was an imperial design to separate the tribals from other communities and thus weaken national unity. The Indian National Congress at its session held at Faizpur felt that "this was yet another attempt to divide the people of India into different groups" (qtd. in Singh, "Colonialism" 407). The isolationist school of policy makers comprised anthropologists and British members of the I.C.S of which G. H. Hutton was the arch-exponent. However, it was Verrier Elwin who got identified with the isolationist stance in the pamphlet the *Loss of Nerve* published in 1941. In this pamphlet, he recommended isolation of the tribals and suggested that the administration should be so adjusted as to allow the tribes to lead their life without interference from outside agencies. He said in conclusion:

> I am not one of those who advocate a policy of absolute isolation, but I do urge a policy of isolation from debasing and impoverishing contact. The aboriginal cannot remain as he is–but is it necessary for him to pass through a long period of degradation before he emerges

> as the civilized man of the future? Could we not keep him in his innocence and happiness for a while till "civilization" is more worthy to instruct him and until a scientific age has learnt how to bring development and change without causing despair? (qtd. in Singh, "Colonialism" 408).

In another pamphlet, *The Aboriginal*, Elwin reiterates his thought:

> I advocate, therefore, for the aboriginals a policy of temporary isolation and protection, and for their civilized neighbours a policy of immediate reform...The essential thing is not to uplift them into a social and economic sphere to which they cannot adapt themselves, but to restore to them the liberties of their own countryside [...] But whatever is done, and I would be the last to lay down a general programme, it must be done with caution and above all with love and reverence. The aboriginals are the real *swadeshi* products of India, in whose presence everyone is foreign. These are the ancient people with moral claims and rights thousands of years old. They were here first; they should come first in our regard. (qtd. in Singh, "Colonialism" 408)

He was attacked by "A.V. Thakkar, who propagated the idea of assimilation of the tribes instead of isolation" (Guha, "Savaging" 2382). Elwin later denied having been an isolationist. He explained that his idea was of "a *temporary* isolation

for certain small tribes, but this was not to keep them as they were, but because at that time the only contacts they had with the outside world were debasing contacts, leading to economic exploitation and cultural destruction" (Elwin, "The Tribal Perspective"17).

He said that he had condemned the policy of isolation. But the confusion arose out of the inept phrase, 'the National Park,' that he coined in the late thirties to underline the need for the protection of the tribes against exploitation. As there were negotiations for transfer of power, the administrators and anthropologists were active to ensure the protection of tribal interests. As Singh mentions:

> Sir John Hubback prepared a note on the Backward tribes. He was of the opinion that the British interest in tribal affairs should continue even after the transfer of power. Hubbock also suggested the formation of a group of anthropologists, and administrators and missionaries which would do more for the hill tribes than an anthropological dictator of the kind suggested by Elwin. Sir John Hubback and Sir Kenneth Fitze who had served in Western and Central India showed concern that with the transfer of power the missionaries would not be able to do good work. They were also critical of Elwin's aim to Hinduize the tribes. The Secretary of State was also critical of the isolationist stance. (Singh, "Colonialism" 410)

In all these debates tribals were nowhere in the picture. They were the objects of the critical gaze. The Adibasi Mahasabha and its leader Jaipal Singh did not attract any notice. K. S. Singh writes: "Hubbock was of the opinion that Jaipal Singh's

influence did not extend beyond the Mundas" ("Colonialism" 412). Thus, the British felt that the tribals were their responsibility and the former formulated policies for the tribals. The principle of partial and full exclusion was later embodied in the Indian Constitution. Constitutional guarantees of protection had to be combined with programmes of rapid development which did not find any place in the colonial framework.

After Independence, the government chalked out a number of provisions to safeguard the interests of the tribals and their development without hampering their culture. It is pertinent here to mention Nehru's views on this issue. His policy was to approach tribal life with respect. He said: "The Tribals may be allowed to develop on their own genius and we should not impose anything on them"(qtd. in Verma iv). He wanted them to advance, but at the same time not "lose their artistry and joy in life and the future that distinguishes them in many ways" (qtd. in Elwin, "The Tribal Perspective" 220). The Indian Constitution adopted by the Constituent Assembly on 26 January 1950 visualized a policy of progressive acculturation of tribal communities. Thus the former policy of their isolation and segregation was finally abandoned. According to the constitutional provision certain tribes were listed as Scheduled Tribes and special facilities were to be provided for their uplift and education. The main criteria adopted for specifying certain communities as Scheduled Tribe include, as Verma points out:

> (i) traditional occupation of a geographical area, (ii) distinctive culture which includes whole spectrum of tribal way of life, i.e.

> language, customs, traditions, religious beliefs, arts, crafts etc., (iii) primitive traits depicting occupational pattern, economy etc. and (iv) lack of educational and techno-economic development. (Verma 6)

There was a suggestion by Jaipal Singh that the term 'adibasi' should be used instead of 'Scheduled Tribe' but Dr. Ambedkar, Chairperson, Drafting Committee of the Constitution, said that "the word Adivasi is really a general term which has no specific legal de jure connotation. Whereas, the word 'Scheduled Tribe' has a fixed meaning, because it enumerates the tribes" (7). It has to be mentioned here that all aboriginal people are not included in the list of Scheduled Tribes. Verma says that there are about 360 Scheduled Tribes (sub-tribes being many more) speaking more than 100 languages.

Tribals have come a long way. Their situation has been changing. With the facilities available to them, their situation is improving to some extent. Some of them are in public positions as doctors, engineers, academics, legislators and so on. They are becoming aware of their reality. Some of them are engaged in research studying what has been said about them. Therefore one has to be careful in using terminology. The fact that terms like 'tribals', 'primitive', 'native' etc. as Edward P. Dozier says, "are often placed within quotation marks and indicate the shaky and unsure ground upon which they rest as designation for the societies which are studied" (195).

From the foregoing account it seems safe to infer that tribal history is marked by struggle and subjugation by outsiders. These are some of the views available on the tribals from sociological accounts but to complete the picture it would be pertinent to look at a few literary texts in order to know how imaginative perceptions of the tribals have contributed to understanding. The following chapters are devoted to this exploration.

Notes

[1] These divisions are made by scholars like H.H. Riseley, B.S.Guha, D.N.Majumdar and others.

[2] The Banjaras are called Lambadas in Andhra Pradesh and Sugali in Karnataka

[3]The British Government decided on a policy of segregating tribes into special areas where their lives and interests would be adequately protected. An Act was passed in 1874 to specify tribal areas into scheduled regions. In 1935 provisions for special treatment of tribal areas were incorporated by constituting partially excluded areas. In the subsequent years upto 1947, a number of acts and regulations were promulgated.

Chapter 3

Tribal India in Colonial Narratives

The Tribal as Noble Savage and Subject to Be Civilized

After having presented a brief history of Tribal India, I would like to discuss a few fictional works by colonial (particularly Anglo-Indian) writers in this chapter. For this purpose I shall discuss the works of Rudyard Kipling. Verrier Elwin and John Masters. Most of the Anglo-Indian writers were directly or indirectly involved in the administration of the Empire. Also, they were in a privileged position compared to their subjects in terms of location. Their narratives represent the tribals as the 'Other.' It is worth explaining these ideas in detail. The phenomenon of the 'Other' in the context of European colonialism, is rooted in the perception of racial difference. The dissemination of this perception is a prime aspect of colonial discourse. Homi K. Bhabha suggests that the objective of colonial discourse was to "construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (154). In *Orientalism*, Edward Said's seminal work on the subject. the author states that, "the very designation of something as Oriental involved an already pronounced evaluative judgment. [. . .] Since the Oriental was a member of the subject race, he had to be subjected, it was that simple"(207). In this observation, Said hints at the fundamental basis of power for the institution of the Other; the ready willingness of

people to be influenced, if not controlled, by a perceived sense of reality without seeking out less illusionary truths.

There are important non-literary sources that must also be looked into in order to understand the concept. In *Beyond Anthropology* (1989), McGrane demonstrates that the Western perception of the 'Other' has undergone several interesting transformations over the last few centuries. During the Renaissance, the non-European races were perceived as 'demoniacal and infernal.' This was modified somewhat in the so-called Enlightenment period that merely dealt in modalities of 'ignorance' and superstition. In the Nineteenth century, the 'Other' was tied to the evolutionary development of humans through fixed stages of progressive civilization. Finally, McGrane suggests that the Twentieth-century response has been to embrace notions of cultural difference and controversy although not un-problematically.

The Euro-centric notion of progress is central to colonial discourse, particularly in its basic assumption that humanity moves from a state of relative ignorance to one of knowledge or enlightenment. As Anthropology blossomed into a science of legitimation, Western thinkers seized on this idea and took it a step further by saying that by studying the 'Other,' we are offered the rare chance to study our own past. This had been one of Freud's contentions in his *Totem and Taboo* (1918). Freud says: "We can thus judge the so-called savage and semi-savage races; their psychic life assumes a peculiar interest for us, for we can recognize in their psychic life a well preserved, early stage of our own development" (3).

Freud saw in the study of the 'savage' races a means of understanding of the neuroses of his own 'civilized' race, an opportunity to use time travel to gain evidence for his psychoanalytic theories and designs. Anthropologists, taking the same approach, saw in the primitive cultures, a ready field for the study of the human race. Brian V. Street, who has worked on representations of primitive society in English fiction in his book *The Savage in Literature* (1975), suggests that "the evolutionary framework of thought enabled the European to accept the unity of mankind without the intellectual discomfort of ascribing to 'primitive' customs the same value and significance as of those of Europe" (5). R.S. Khare labels anthropology "Europe's discourse bearer on the non-European Other" (6). This description correctly implies that this discipline was established with the aforementioned intention of justifying the treatment of the 'Other.' McGrane, suggests that anthropology has been "an extremely subtle and spiritual kind of cognitive imperialism, a power-based monologue, a monologue about alien cultures" (127). McGrane is not alone in holding the opinion that anthropology is to be held largely responsible for furthering the stereotyping of the 'Other.' Johannes Fabian takes a careful look at this issue in his book *Time and the Other* (1983) and offers many insights into why the study of human beings began as cognitive imperialism. Fabian describes a fundamental contradiction in anthropology's approach to the study of the Other. He writes:

> On the one hand we dogmatically insist that anthropology rests on ethnographic research involving personal, prolonged interaction with the Other. But then we pronounce upon the knowledge gained from

> such research, a discourse, which construes the Other in terms of distance, spatial and temporal. (xi)

Abdul R. Janmohamed highlights another aspect of colonial discourse in the following statement:

> Just as imperialists "administer" the resources of the conquered country, so colonialists' discourse "commodifies" the native subject into a stereotyped object and uses him as resource for colonial fiction. The European writer commodifies the native by negating his individuality, his subjectivity so that he is now perceived as a generic being that can be exchanged for any other native. (83)

Stereotyping indicates a certain relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, and indicates that this relationship is established by the colonizer. At the most basic level, the 'Other' is defined within the colonial framework as anyone non-European or non-white. There are many other ways of thinking about the 'Other.' From a psychoanalytic perspective, for example, the 'Other' is viewed as the Self's double. Such a reading would appear, at first glance to lack the politics of the purely racial construct. These prevalent notions have shaped the Anglo-Indian writers' perception about the tribes. In the narratives of these writers, tribals are also mentioned, though they do not occupy a central position. They appear as a backdrop.

We discussed in the previous chapter the colonial legacy of the term 'tribe' and how the colonial rulers and anthropologists perceived the tribal people and

portrayed them. The fiction writers' views were not very different from that of the anthropologists and the administrators. To know how these perceptions were shaped we need to go back to the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. It was then that a number of thinkers started reflecting on the concept of primitiveness. The Eighteenth century took interest in the noble savage led by thinkers like Rousseau. The ancient myth of the Golden Age and the traditional dichotomies between nature and art or town and country were discussed. The age of pre-civilized man was portrayed as the age of innocence, peace, morality, un-polluted purity, prosperity, equality, satisfaction and non-corruption. For instance these qualities are described in Aphra Behn's novel *Oroonoko* which was very popular in the Eighteenth century though it had been published in 1688. The novel is based on the classical concept of the Golden Age describing primitive people in 'their state of innocence.' Aphra Behn comments on the superior simplicity and morality of both African slaves and the indigenous Indians.

In the Eighteenth century, praise and admiration for 'the noble savage' became very popular. Rousseau was one of the thinkers who brought this concept into the field of philosophical discussion. In his essays--*Discours Sur Les Sciences et Les Arts* (1750) or *Discourse on Sciences and Arts* and *Discours Sur l'Origile de l'ine'galite* (1755) or *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, he extolled natural man over his civilized counterpart. He contrasted the innocence and contentment of primitive man in a 'state of nature,' his mode of existence determined by none but genuine needs, with the dissatisfaction and perpetual agitation of modern social man. In the Eighteenth century, Oliver Goldsmith's well-known poem, "The Deserted

Village," carried some of Rousseau's ideas and celebrated the idyllic pastoral life of Auburn, the "loveliest village of the plain." The poet lamented the growth of trade, and the migration of the peasantry to urban centers. The same idea is reinforced in George Colman's play, *Inkle and Yarico*, Richard Cumberland's play, *The West Indian*; Mrs Inchbald's *The Child of Nature*, and Robert Bage's novel, *Hemsprong*. A number of travel writings also emerged depicting the life of Islanders, Eskimos, Laplanders, Negroes, etc. There was also much curiosity about the phenomenon of the 'wild child' which one finds later in Rudyard Kipling's *Mowgli* and Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan of the Apes.*

The Romantic movement had also imbibed some of these ideas. Its stress was on Nature, freedom (both political and artistic) and the natural man. The Romantics saw and felt things brilliantly afresh. They virtually invented certain landscapes--the Lakes, the Alps, the Bays of Italy. They were strenuous walkers, hill-climbers, sea-bathers and river-lovers. They had a new intuition for the primal power of the wild landscape. Terror, Passion and the Sublime were the essential concepts of Romanticism. The Anglo-Indian writers who wrote about India were also influenced by Romanticism. This has been reflected in their writings on the tribals. They were fascinated by the landscape of the tribal areas, nature untouched by modernity, and the tribal population in their 'Arcadian' simplicity. When we look at the representations of the tribals we find similar images—the tribals as exotic, innocent, loyal, simple, superstitious, etc.

If we look at the situation in colonial India, we find that fiction, translation, ethnography, and fiction formed a significant part of the colonial discourse. Fiction on India was responsible for shaping images of India in the minds of a number of readers in England. Some of them came to India with these images and prejudices. Translation was necessary for the administrators in obtaining information to know their subjects. Anthropology and ethnography in the same way played a significant role in the administration. This perhaps prompted the American anthropologist, Kathleen Gough in an article, "Anthropology and Imperialism" published in 1968, to describe anthropology as "the child of western imperialism." Ethnography provided a vast quantity of detailed, meticulously collected information about the socio-cultural institutions of its subjects. The close connections between *imperia* and *studia* can be seen in the resolution passed at a meeting in 1920 attended by government officials and University and British Museum representatives asking for the establishment of an Imperial School of Anthropology. It states:

> In the highest interest of the Empire, it is necessary to extend and complete the organization of the teaching of Anthropology at the Universities of Great Britain [so that those intending to spend their lives in outposts of empire] will acquire sound and accurate knowledge of the habits, customs, social and religious ideas and ideals of the Eastern and non-European races subject to his Majesty the King Emperor. (qtd. in Niranjana 73)

Thus, the rise of anthropology and ethnography in the colonial era helped in establishing fieldwork as an important methodology for imperial rule. In this context, it is interesting to see how tribal India was depicted in colonial fiction and ethnography. There have been several attempts to represent different tribes in ethnography and fiction by the Anglo-Indian writers during the colonial period. These writings on the tribals evoke different kinds of images and feed into the ethnographical and administrative inputs to colonial discourse.

Rudyard Kipling was one of the most distinguished novelists in the Anglo-Indian tradition to have written extensively on Anglo-India. In some of his stories, tribals do find a place even if they are merely a backdrop. The story "The Tomb of His Ancestors" is a fine example. To understand Rudyard Kipling's perspective on tribals, it will be useful to look at Kipling's life in brief. Kipling was born in 1865 and spent his early childhood in India. At the age of six he was sent with his sister to England to begin school. He went to a lesser public school in England designed for children of the colonial servants. He returned to India in 1882. He worked as a journalist with the *Civil and Military Gazette* and *The Pioneer*. Kipling left India in 1889. Later, he stayed for a while in the United States and South Africa. He won the Nobel Prize in 1907. Though Kipling did not live in India all through his life, he wrote about her from his memory. Because of his upbringing and his affection for India, Kipling is not considered an alien. As Edward Said rightly points out, "Kipling wrote not only about India but he was of it" (*Culture* 166). Kipling arrived in the literary scene when Imperial rule was beginning to be strong. The first half of the Nineteenth century witnessed the pragmatic and utilitarian impulse and reforming

zeal. The Mutiny of 1857 was a major jolt which continued to haunt Anglo-India and its cultural productions upto, and beyond, Independence. If we put Kipling's early literary career within the time frame divided by A J Greenberger, Kipling will fall under the Era of Confidence where the supporters of the Raj shared a common faith in the value of the British Empire. Greenberger's *British Image of India* (1969) puts the writers of fiction on India into three periods. While admitting the possibility of "arbitrariness in any such division," Greenberger calls "the period from 1880 to1910, the Era of Confidence, the period ranging from 1910 to 1935 the Era of Doubt, and the period from 1935 to 1960 as the Era of Melancholy"(5).

As a result of his background and upbringing, Kipling's Indian fiction is marked by profound concerns over imperial security. His stories give evidence of the way power is exerted over the native. It is worth looking at how his early fiction relates to power, particularly his famous collection *Plain Tales from the Hills* where the narrator-figure represents Kipling and his views. This particular aspect has been dealt with in detail by Moore-Gilbert in *Kipling and Orientalism.* For example, in "Miss Youghal's Sais" the narrator is initially linked to the censorious Anglo-Indian opinion of Strickland's habit of going 'Fantee' among natives. Many of Kipling's narratives take place in the context of the rules of the master-slave dialectic. "The Tomb of His Ancestors" is as an example of Kipling's stories representing the treacherous servant. This is clearly a metaphor for India in revolt. Apart from the *Plain Tales*, the famous *Jungle Books* also show evidence of Kipling's imperial attitude. Jatindra Nayak and Sujit Mahapatra explore this aspect in their study of the *Jungle Books* in an article titled "The Taming of the Jungle: A Reading of Kipling's

The Jungle Books"(2000-01). They point out that taming the jungle by man is celebrated by the writer. Kipling's narrative of Mowgli taming the jungle shows Mowgli, the man-child, playing the role of any man in the jungle, and the other animals viewing him with respect.

This may be taken to be emblematic of man's superior position in the theory of evolution. He is the first to survive. Mowgli is introduced in the first story of the *Jungle Books*, "Mowgli's Brothers" as a "naked brown baby who could just walk" (Kipling, *Jungle Books* 10). He is even respected by Shere Khan, the tiger, king of the jungle. The superiority of a human baby to a fully developed and ferocious animal is emphasized here. Mowgli does not cry as we expect a human child to do but laughs when he sees father wolf. Mowgli grows up as a wolf-child. It is to be noted that Mowgli has in Romulus, the founder of the Roman Empire, the first great empire in the Western imagination, a famous antecedent. Romulus too was suckled by a she-wolf. Kipling perhaps sees the British Empire as a sequel to the Roman Empire.

With his advent in the jungle, Mowgli establishes his superiority. As a man-child, Mowgli gives ample evidence of this superiority. Bagheera and Baloo find him an extraordinary pupil. Being a man-cub he learns all the laws and masters all the words of the jungle: this is what protects him in emergency situations. Thus Mowgli represents the typical colonizer. The idea was that to be an effective imperialist, one must become thoroughly familiar with the ways of the colonized, as Mowgli was with respect to the jungle and its inhabitants. Sir William Jones' learning of Sanskrit to avoid being tricked by the pundits in court acquires a special resonance here.

Strickland, the police officer in several of Kipling's stories tries to find out as much about the natives as he can, so that he can control them better. Mowgli finally knows more about the jungle than his teachers. Unlike Baloo, he masters the snake language too. He now feels reasonably safe against all accidents in the jungle, because, "neither snake, bird or beast" can hurt him.

Later Mowgli is made to realize that he does not belong to the animals (wolves) but to man. This realization is the turning point in his relationship with the other animals of the jungle. This is again an aspect of colonial thinking. The colonizers killed wild dogs to "protect" the herbivores. They also saw themselves as the saviour of the forests. Mowgli refuses to flee and in this invincibility he becomes a man. So he decides to attack them. As he himself says, he likes nothing better than "to pull the whiskers of death and make the jungle know that he was their overlord"(Kipling, *The Jungle* 241). Mowgli thus does what the colonizers wanted to do in India. i.e., exterminate the entire species of wild dogs. The wild dogs were also victims of a cultural bias on the part of the colonizers. Wild dogs were blamed for thinning the forests of herbivores. They were regarded as cruel killers. Hence in "Red Dog" they have been presented as the marauding Huns, wantonly killing anything on their path. They are shown as so terrible that tigers desert their kill for the wild dogs, and even Hathi gives way to them.

For the British, the wild dog came closer to the ecologically profligate tribal hunter. This is because the tribes would not kill wild dogs even if money were offered to them: the tribals probably considered the wild dog as a fellow hunter or comrade.

We come across the colonial imaging of a tribal hunter in "The King's Ankus," the story that comes before "Red Dog." In this story, a Gond is presented as a wanton killer just as the wild dog has been described. Gonds are the dominant tribe of the Central Provinces. But in this story, the Gond probably stands for any tribal. The Gond steals the king's ankus from Mowgli. It is puzzling why he steals it because it is not clear if he knows its value or whether he can trade with it, Yet, he is represented as killing any one who appears to be a possible obstacle for the sake of the ankus. It illustrates a clear case of prejudiced representation, since the Gonds killed almost always only for food.

Mowgli, once recognized as a man, becomes the lord of the jungle. When he behaves like a man he acts like a master. Mowgli as an astute general, engineers the death of Shere Khan with the help of his commanders, Akela and Gray Brother. After the native children, it is the turn of the native adults to submit to Mowgli's authority. Baldeo, who had bullied Mowgli earlier, is not allowed to skin the tiger and is spared only when he proclaims Mowgli as the 'Maharaj.'

Hathi who is known as the king of the jungle accepts Mowgli as the master. It suggests that to Hathi Mowgli is a brown baby, but in spirit, he is a white man. Further, when the jungle is let in, a Gond remarks that only the white man could check such a rampage. Since Mowgli orders the carnage, if any one can stop it, it is he. Thus Mowgli appears more and more in the role of a white man. He seems to be the prototype of Kim with whom he shares many similarities. Although Kim's colour was brown like Mowgli's, the faintest trace of the white man in him was enough to

make him the colonizer. Thus, Mowgli appears more and more in the role of a white man.

After knowing the jungle well, the pleasantest part of Mowli's life begins. Again, this is because he has become the absolute ruler. He also becomes the lord of the Middle Jungle. i.e., the life that lay close to the earth or under it by humiliating the smug cobra in "The King's Ankus." His position as lord is acknowledged at the council Rock where he had earlier been looked upon as an outcast; he now sits on a rock higher than that of the leader.

In "Red Dogs" Mowgli's role as the Lord of the Jungle is tested. The news of the coming of the wild dogs spread in the jungle. Mowgli can save himself, but it is his responsibility as the lord of the jungle to save his subjects. This is again a colonial kind of thought. The encounter with the Gond allows Mowgli to occupy another rung in the evolutionary ladder. Mowgli gets the better of him and demonstrates that there is no human or animal left in the jungle for him to conquer. After the killing of the wild dogs, there is no room to doubt Mowgli's status as the veritable lord of the jungle.

The Jungle Books thus glorify the taming of the jungle and the evolution of man. Kipling has put Mowgli's story in an evolutionary framework. Mowgli has been represented as a leader or master. Others should follow him. This indicates the colonial attitude of the writer.

Kipling's "The Tomb of His Ancestor" is another instance of the portrayal of the white man as superior to the Bhil tribes of Central India. John Chinn has been appointed as an Army Officer in the Satpura region in Central India. The Chinn family had a long history of working in different capacities in this region. Their inheritance goes back to the time of war at Seringapatnam in 1799. It is said that one member from the Chinn family assisted in the capture of Seringapatnam in 1799. John Chinn's father, Lionel Chinn and grandfather John Chinn, the first, also worked in this area. John grows up here as a child and comes back from England to work here. The regiment that he joins as an officer is populated by a lot of Bhil people. Kipling describes them as "the strangest of the many strange races in India. They were, and at heart are wild men, furtive, shy, full of untold superstitions" (Kipling, "The Tomb" 110).

Kipling further claims that the white men were responsible for bringing the Bhils to civilization and that if this had not happened the tribals would be making themselves crazy thieves and cattle stealers. Kipling here reifies the contributions made by the British in civilizing the tribals. Indians have not lagged behind in such reification. It is a known fact that "leaders of underprivileged castes in India from Sree Narayana Guru to Ambedkar also preferred colonial rule to feudal governance, and welcomed the liberating influence of western education and egalitarian democracy" (Satchidanandan 12). Some Dalit scholars (Chandrabhan Prasad and others) even in our times believe that the British were instrumental in providing them education and employment, which was denied to them by Hindu society for centuries.

Though this might be a fact, Kipling's reinforcement of it shows his superior attitude and proves that his ideas are identical to that of the colonial rulers.

John Chinn the First (John Chinn's father), proved himself to be a strict administrator and was successful in administering the Bhils. They were frightened of his stern rule. He attempted to 'civilize' them as well. The Bhils who were in regiments were taken for *shikar* as they had to be humoured. According to Kipling, even after joining the regiment, the Bhils had not given up their hereditary traits: "The uniformed men were virtuous in many ways, but they needed humouring. They felt bored and homesick unless taken after tigers as beaters[...]"(111). John Chinn joins the regiment and is liked by the Bhils. Some of them recall their childhood days and are happy that the same child whom they used to carry has come back to them. Bukta, the headman is one of the happiest persons to see John Chinn back. He says: "I bore you in my arms, Sahib, when I was a strong man and you were a small one—crying, crying, crying! I your servant [sic], as I was your father's before you. We are all your servants." (113). This is how they acknowledge their loyalty and offer their service. Thus the Bhils are shown as very loyal and subservient people. Bukta here is like a 'Bhakta' or a devotee of John Chinn. He is ready to do anything for him. He not only offers himself but promises that his family members would also serve the master. He says, "my nephew shall make a good servant, or I will beat him twice a day"(113-114). It is interesting to see how Kipling makes Bukta proclaim his subservient position. Bukta has a sense of fulfilment that his 'Bhagwan' or God himself has come to his door step. He is happy that John Sahib remembers his people.

He has not forgotten them. He remembers his own people as his father had remembered them before. Bukta further says:

> Now can I die. But first I will live and show the Sahib how to kill tigers. That *that* yonder is my nephew. If he is not a good servant, beat him and send him to me, and I will surely kill him, for now the Sahib is with his own people. Ai, Jan *baba*--Jan *baba*! My Jan *baba*! I will stay here and see that this does his work well. Take off his boots, fool. Sit down upon the bed, Sahib, and let me look. It is Jan *baba*! ("The Tomb"114).

John Chinn on the contrary has a condescending attitude towards Bukta. For instance, when he jumps into the river for a bath, very naturally stripping and leaving Bukta by the clothes, Bukta stares at him. Chinn says: "How the little devil stares!"(118). He calls him names. He has contempt for the tribe. This is not unlike the condescending attitude of many white people who worked among the tribes. For example Bronislaw Malinowski, the famous anthropologist, who had done extensive research on tribal communities wrote negatively about them in his diary. Clifford Geertz in an essay titled "From the Native's Point of View" in his book *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (1983) highlights this aspect.

John Chinn on the other hand has a different plan in mind. He wants the Bhils to be vaccinated. This has been tried by the Maratha official, but he has not been successful. The vaccinator comes with lancets, lymph, and an officially registered

calf. The Bhils are angry with him and bind him and keep him captive. John Chinn takes leave and goes to Satpura. His grandfather was buried there. The Bhils believe that his grandfather rides a ghost-tiger. He used to be a mighty hunter. May be it was the tiger's revenge, or perhaps he's hunting them still. He goes to the tomb of his ancestors and makes a plan. He tells them that he is the incarnation of Senior John Chinn and if they obey him he will not ride the ghost-tiger anymore. Thereafter, he asks them to undergo vaccination.

Chinn kills his first tiger and comes to Bukta's village. The villagers feel honoured that John Chinn reincarnated has come to their village after killing the first tiger. Chinn comes to know that his family name and pedigree serve him well. They tell him that he should take care of the appearance of his revered ancestor. This is because when a local god reappears on earth it's always an excuse for trouble of some kind. John Chinn visits the tomb and comes to know about the devotion of the tribals for his grandfather. As Kipling narrates: "The weathered marble four-square tomb of Jan Chinn was hung about with wild flowers and nuts, packets of wax and honey, bottles of native spirits, and infamous cigars, with buffalo horns and plumes of dried grass. At one end was a rude clay image of a white man, in the old-fashioned top-hat, riding on a bloated tiger" (128).

When he visits the tomb of his ancestors, he recalls them as members of his family. He also realizes his supremacy as a ruler. He says, "I have come this far only because the Satpura folk are foolish, and dared not visit our lines. Now bid them wait on me *here*. I am not a servant, but the master of Bhils" (129). He goes and sits near

the tomb. Bukta, like an intermediary, calculates the situation and tells him in the morning that the people are terribly afraid, and that the best thing would be to give them orders. Chinn can do that. In the following morning, he appears and orders them to bring before him the bound-up vaccinator. When they bring in the Mahratta vaccinator, he gives them the impression that he himself is the reincarnated Jan Chinn, and proclaims:

> 'I have come on foot from my house' (the assembly shuddered) 'to make clear a matter which any other than a Satpura Bhil would have seen with both eyes from a distance. Ye know the Small-pox, who pits and scars your children so that they look like wasp-combs. It is an order of the Government that whoso is scratched on the arm with these little knives which I hold up is charmed against Her. All Sahibs are thus charmed, and very many Hindoos. This is the mark of the charm. Look!' (131-2).

Then the aged diplomat Bukta himself comes forward and shows his arm. He proves himself to be a 'good' colonized subject:

> He fell to Chinn's hand, and dared not cry out. As soon as he was freed he dragged up a companion, and held him fast, and the crisis became, as it were, a child's sport; for the vaccinated chased the unvaccinated to treatment, vowing that all the tribe must suffer equally. The women shrieked, and the children ran howling; but Chinn laughed, and waved the pink-tipped lancet.

'It is an honour,' he cried. 'Tell them, Bukta, how great an honour it is that I myself should mark them. (137)

The tribals, as we find in this story, are represented as servile, and very loyal and devoted to their masters. Once they believe in somebody, they have great faith in that person and are ready to do anything. The tribal chief Bukta is like a worshipper of the Chinns. He says that he and his people are born to serve the Sahibs. Kipling gives a hint about their loyalty when he mentions the Dussera ritual of the Rajput ruler. He mentions that the ordination of a Rajput king is not complete till he has been marked on the forehead with blood from the veins of a Bhil. However, this could be read as the last shadow of the tribal's old rights as the original owner of the soil. Kipling sees them as brave and courageous and highlights their innate love of hunting. Though they are appointed as soldiers they have to be entertained. They feel homesick and bored unless they are sent after tigers as beaters. They shoot tigers on foot. They follow a wounded tiger as unconcernedly as though it were a sparrow with a broken wing. Kipling's story also reflects the stereotypical images of the tribals as barbarous and superstitious. The fact that they believe that the Senior Chinn is wandering on a horse is a case in point. The white perception about the tribals as barbarous is seen when the Major warns John Chinn saying: "Take care they don't send you to your family vault in your youth and innocence" (128). On the other hand the Bhils are respectful to the person they worship as 'God' and have a firm belief in reincarnation, in life after death, and in the superstitions that characterize the Bhil mind. The Bhils refuse to get themselves vaccinated thinking the 'Hindoo' who came armed with a needle and calf is there to cast a spell on them and kill them using a

knife. John Chinn finds a way of placating the Bhils, assuming that he, John Chinn I reincarnated, would no more ride the Hills of Satpura at night. He has to use this occasion to get the Bhils vaccinated also. In the end, John Chinn comes out triumphant in not only killing the man-eater, but also combating smallpox. Thus the tribals are treated as children who can be easily cheated or tamed. The British attitude towards the tribals has been that they are immature in mind and can easily be taken for granted. Moreover, because they are considered savages and don't know what is good for them, they need to be educated and civilized. Kipling's own attitude is that it is the white man's burden to civilize the noble savage, and this is reflected in this story. Ashis Nandy, who has studied Kipling's narratives in relation to colonialism, rightly points out that "Rudyard Kipling (1862-1936) thought he knew which side of the great divide between imperial Britain and subject of India, he stood. He was certain that to be ruled by Britain was India's right; to rule India was Britain's duty"(64).

Verrier Elwin's works, especially the earlier ones, show some of the above-mentioned characteristics of colonialism. Elwin came to India as a missionary. He came to know about Gandhi's freedom movement when he was in Oxford. His ideas of India were shaped by conventional readings. Indians for him were 'wogs' or 'natives' incapable of self-government, and had to be kept in their proper place. Later, his introduction to the writings of Tagore and Gandhi and books on Indian philosophy, changed his mind. He thought he would make reparations for the damage done by his countrymen to India. He left Oxford and came to India in 1927, and joined a monastic ashram called Christa Seva Sangh in Poona. Its objective was to

Indianise Christianity. Later, he heard about the tribals and decided to work among them. He lived among them and studied their culture and wrote a number of ethnographic accounts about them.

Apart from his ethnographic works, Elwin has two novels, *Phulmat of the Hills* (1937) and *A Cloud That's Dragonish* (1938). The novel *Phulmat of the Hills* tells the story of a Pardhan girl of extraordinary sweetness, a gifted dancer much admired in her village. Struck by leprosy, Phulmat is abandoned by her lover. In grief she takes to the road, and after a long and difficult journey opens a shop in a distant village where her antecedents are not known. Here she lives out her days, selling cigarettes and betel nut and thinking of her lost lover.

The narrative is full of poems, riddles and stories put in the mouth of its characters, interspersed with straight dialogue. Elwin's novel highlights the beauty of tribal women. The description of Phulmat's sexuality is a case in point. About her he writes: "Phulmat's face was demure, so demure it seemed that it was a virtue to gaze at it, it was almost Madonna-like till her smile lit it, and then it shone with the bright spirit of mischief and allurement. Then you saw that her lips were full and soft, apt for a lover, her teeth shining white, her hair brushed straight and smooth on either side [...]" (Elwin, *Phulmat* 13). We may take the description of another girl called Adri as another example. Elwin writes:

> And there was Adri drawing water, alone. She was a glorious golden brown; that was what you noticed in her—colour; form, line, contour hardly mattered in that brilliant orange gold. She wore a white sari

> bordered with red. So as you looked at her you had an impression of red and gold and white--it was a royal sight. Her hair was a rich brown, carefully hidden beneath the fold of her sari that passed over her head, but when she was excited it would begin to stray over her forehead--shy little creepers of enticement were those curls; you would see them for a minute, and then they were back under their shelter; but after that you knew that they were there. And you could not forget that thought. When she smiled it was as though a field of yellow ramtilla were lit by sunlight suddenly. Her whole body smiled; eyes, nose, mouth, breasts, hands and feet were suffused with that brilliant joy.
>
> But there was no more to her than that. She was a perfect animal of the forest, coloured, balanced, formed for every delight of the senses. (*Phulmat* 108-109)

Elwin not only celebrates the beauty of tribal women but also relates many things found in tribal society to his own society. He compares the smile of Phulmat with that of Madonna, and the tribal dance with the European ballet. The novel is like an exercise in ethnography which informs his own people about the clan, height, and totems of his subjects. Talking of Bhuta in the same novel Elwin writes: "Bhuta belonged to the Baria clan of the Gonds; his totem was the cobra; all his life he had revered and protected snakes"(14). Thus he highlights some aspects of tribal life that he found strange. For instance, he describes the Phag festival as follows: "It was the time of Phag,

the festival when Gond women arm themselves with sticks and cudgels and avenge themselves on mankind. They have the right to beat any man they can catch, and to go on beating him till he buys them off with a present" (17). Ramachandra Guha in his book on Elwin, *Savaging the Civilized* (1999) rightly observes that the novel is "a tale of some ethnographic interest, held together by the focus on the fate of its central character" (112). This aspect perhaps prompted H.E. Bates to think that the book was "a piece of the best kind of romance, rich in emotion, unsentimental, rich in colour but firmly rooted in fact [...] realistic and frank, in its portrayal of love as Maupassant" (qtd. in Guha, *Savaging* 112).

Elwin's other novel, *A Cloud That's Dragonish* (1938), describes a mysterious series of deaths in the village of Sitalpani, of livestock, pets and human beings. The villagers believe these deaths to be the handiwork of the witches and the suspicion shifts from one woman to another. Finally they realize that the culprit is Motihari, a Gond girl. But the Gond Gunia ('medicine-man') Panda Baba appears and through his inferences uncovers the real murderer. This is a Pardhan youth, Lamu. Lamu's mother had been persecuted as a witch and killed in another village by Motihari's father. Vowing revenge, when he grows up Lamu kills the murderer and is determined to kill the daughter as well. On being exposed by Panda Baba, he commits suicide. It is significant that Elwin's novel is set on the theme of witchcraft. Each chapter starts with an epigram on the persecution of witches in medieval Europe. This is done perhaps to remind the readers that medieval Europe was no better than the tribal world. The implication is that tribals are not savages as seen by the Europeans.

On the other hand tribals are cultured people. It is important to note that the novel does not end with superstition but with an awakening in the end. The tribals themselves discover that all the mishaps are caused not by any witch, but are the handiwork of Lamu. This is made known to them not by a saviour from outside but by the tribal Gunia, a medicine man.

In his ethnographical writings also Elwin initially concentrated more on what he thought was lacking in the tribal people. Indeed, many things were strange and peculiar to him. He highlighted what he considered strange. For instance, Elwin takes pleasure in describing Panda Baba, the medicine man, who once came and asked for a little dung from Elwin's rabbit-run. He wanted to touch the feet of a newly born child with it, "so that the boy would run as fast as a hare"(Elwin, *Leaves* 7). We find in Elwin another instance of the 'Other' being represented in strange terms. He writes: "In our village there was a child with prolepses of the intestine. The mother caught a river crab, roasted it whole and gave it to the child to eat and the child recovered" (17). Be it the practice of Gond witchcraft, which Sleeman also discusses in his *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official* (1844), or other issues, Elwin keeps on adding more puzzles in his style. Elwin's ethnographical works give evidence of his perception of the tribals. The privileged position of the author is quite obvious in his representation of the tribals. Elwin mentions in his diary that his main activities were to improve the lot of the poor tribals. His diary, which he wrote between 1932 and1936 reflects the Christian belief that the poor and the meek are blessed people and that they inherit the earth. He thought of his role as an 'improver' of their condition by teaching the primitive people the light of civilization. Elwin evidently

looked at the Gond tribes through the eyes of a person with a sense of racial superiority.

Elwin's early ethnographic writings also show his patronizing attitude. He emerged as an eloquent spokesman for the tribal communities of the Indian heartland. He shifted his activities from social work to writing. His friend, Shamrao Hivale took over Elwin's earlier charge of providing education and health. Elwin devoted his time to writing on the tribals. He said: "The pen is my chief weapon with which I fight for my poor" (qtd. in Guha, *Savaging* 2379). As a part of the series on ethnography, he wrote a book on the Baiga entitled *The Baiga* (1939), in which he describes all aspects of the Baiga tribe such as the cult of Bewar, magic, the diagnosis and cure of diseases, their knowledge system, recreations, and their art of love, their dress and ornaments, their festivals and ceremonies, their food habits and taboos. *The Baiga* was the first book in which the erotic life of an Indian tribe has been described with such intimate details and deep knowledge. Elwin's other work *The Agaria* (1942) is considered to be a classic of Indian ethnology. Here he has shown the common features that the Agarias share with the Baiga, such as kinship rules, avoidances, the law of inheritance, pregnancy and menstruation rules. He also mentions that the Agaria have a striking and distinctive mythology which controls and vitalizes the material culture of the tribe. Elwin was also impressed by the Agaria's contribution to magic, and "the tribal neurosis of fear and magic." He points out in the Preface that "the marriage of myth and craft is the central theme of the book. The Agaria are people absorbed in their craft and their material; they seem to have little life apart from the roar of the bellows and the clang of hammer upon iron. Very few of them

live to a great age, they have poor memories, there are a few outstanding personalities among them" (ix-x). His book *The Aboriginals* (1943) is a polemical tract, directed at a wider public. He pleads with the people who practice home rule that the aboriginal be given full freedom of the forest and privileges. Elwin's *Maria Murder and Suicide* (1947) is a study of the reasons that drive the unsophisticated primitive men to kill and wound their fellows. In this book, after a brief sketch of Maria life and customs, the author examines the records of one hundred cases of murder and fifty cases of suicide, and finally makes valuable suggestions for improving the treatment of aboriginal criminals in jail. The commonest motives for crime as he points out among the Bison-horn Maria are sexual jealousy and resentment or shame caused by public rebuke, but drunkenness and a weakening of self-control also lead to murder sometimes. In *The Muria and Their Ghotul* (1947), Elwin defends the ghotul, the village dormitory system of the Muria tribals. According to him the Bastar ghotul is one of the most highly developed and carefully organized in the world. It is an institution, tracing its origin to Lingo Pen, a famous cult-hero of the Gonds. All unmarried boys and girls of the tribe are members of the ghotul. This membership is carefully organized. After a period of testing boys and girls are initiated and given a special title with a graded rank and social duties. Elwin says that it helps the youth to mingle freely and helps them in developing a positive attitude towards sex.

To sum up, Elwin's ideas about the tribals are that they are children of Nature, and that they have an intimate knowledge about birds and animals, that the forest provides them food, fruits, medicine and material for housing and agriculture. They call themselves the children of *Dhartimata*, the mother earth, who feeds and takes

care of them. They have intimate relations with the forest. He says that the Gond "idea of heaven was miles and miles of forest without any forest guards," and his idea of hell was "miles and miles of forest without any *mahua* trees"(Elwin, *Baiga* 58). He greatly appreciates their community living. Elwin gives an instance of this aspect in one of his novels. He states how one day the villagers go to get wild mangoes from the jungle, and at the end of the day, "half the village was sucking mangoes" (Elwin, *Phulmat* 91-102). He also recognises that women in Gond society enjoy a high position. His ethnographic enquiry among the Baigas taught him that the Baiga did not have any notion of sexual dreams. He finds that the tribal attitude to children is very healthy, they have unity and a sense of solidarity and lead a communitarian life.

Elwin's account of the tribals is rather personal. It is also marked by some sort of ambivalence here and there. At first, to his credit, he is unlike his predecessors who had negative things to say about the Indian tribes. However, Elwin's deference to tribal people and their culture makes him romanticize them and glorify their culture. His perception of tribal women is that they are beautiful, well-built and sensual and in this he reacts to the unsympathetic and contemptuous representations of the tribals by his predecessors such as James Forsyth, who described Gond women as "great robust creatures who are more like monkeys than human beings" (Forsyth 182). Elwin's description of the tribals is that they are the children of Nature and that their culture is pure and therefore should not be contaminated by the outside world. This of course is controversial and open to debate. Nevertheless, Elwin's approach is more acceptable than his predecessors because the attitude of Elwin is that of a recognition of 'difference' rather than 'deficiency.'

Tribals appear in the works of John Masters, another noted Anglo-Indian writer. Masters has more than fifteen novels on a variety of themes. Born in Calcutta in 1914 in a family which served the Raj for five generations, Masters was an active participant in the Empire, first as an army man and later as a writer. His novel, *To the Coral Strand* (1962), depicts the tribals colourfully even though they constitute only the backdrop to the events described by him.

The Gonds are depicted as primitive people far away from civilization. Masters states: "[they are] a race of aborigines, living widely scattered over these Vindhya Hills of Central India and completely out of touch with the modern world. They [are] not a relic of medieval times, nor yet of India's Golden Age, but of pre-history" (Masters, *Coral Strand* 21). His intention to describe them as the 'Other' is evident from his description of their physical features. He describes the appearance of the tribal chief Gulu: "He wore a loincloth, and nothing else, and carried a small long-handled axe in his hand. He was short, square and very black, with short grizzled hair over a wide, angular wrinkled face"(27). The representation is also marked by ethnographic vocabulary. He describes their habitat, diet, drink, and dress in addition to their occupations and means of entertainment. Like an ethnographer Masters portrays them as small, dark people with bows and arrows (27). They eat meat and fish, not "mice or worms," and "curried vegetables and chapattis." They live in small compact huts, "and two or three families lived in caves" (29). They drink fiery mahua arrack, and dance vigorously. The visitors are provided with female companions.

Masters not only characterizes them as primitive, but highlights their poverty and misery. For instance, Rodney Savage, the protagonist of the novel, faints at the sight of an eight year old Gond girl who has been starving to death and is lying unconscious in front of the old temples. Savage swears that he would eat the same food as the poorest of the Gonds just to know what it was like to starve. The poverty of the Gonds cannot be separated from the poverty of Indians in general. In portraying the poverty of the Gonds, Masters makes them pitiable and wants to impress upon the English readers in India and abroad that the Gonds need help. H.S. Mahle feels that their poverty is actually the result of the economic exploitation by the British which Masters overlooks in his novel.

Masters portrayal of the Gond women is exotic and romantic. He says: "Many women wore the red *garghara*, the short swinging skirt of the peasant women, feeling that it was more proper--as the temple carvings often showed--to lift them or have them lifted while they danced and coupled, rather than go stark naked" (*Coral Strand* 102).

The portrayal of the two girls Kunti and Devi in the novel proves that Masters highlights the lustful and seamy side of tribal womanhood. He does this to lure the Western lovers of the primitive to read his record of a vanishing civilization and in order to be pleased with the exotic and romantic. His description shows the white man as masculine, overpowering India, which in turn is viewed, as feminine. Rodney's sexual encounter with these two girls is a case in point. He says: "[...] all I could feel was flesh, and all I could smell was ...India" (33).

Masters perceives and presents tribal culture from a European standpoint and in relation to his 'superior' culture. In *Bugles and a Tiger: A Personal Adventure* (1956), he declines to call the tribal dances by the word 'dance'; the more appropriate word is the Indian word 'nautch' since the word 'dance' "gives to Westerners little impression of these shuffled Oriental ballets, where dancers and assisting chorus act out in move and pause and countermove some long fairy tale of Hindu gods and devils" (182).

Masters does not like the Pathans too. The Pathans are the nomadic tribes of the North West belt of India. They combine nomadic life and tilling of the barren land. They come down to the plains through different routes such as the Kabul river, Khyber pass, the Kurram river, the Tochi river, the Gomal river and the Balan pass. They sell blankets and dry fruits, and lend money on loan at a high rate of interest. The Pathans have been portrayed as homosexual. In his *Bugles and a Tiger* Masters highlights the strange aspect of Pathan life. He picks up a Pathan song "Zakhmi Dil" which also suggests homosexuality. He mentions that the Pathans' main occupation is kidnapping and robbery. He finds the Pathans to be cruel towards women and captives. He narrates different forms of punishment administered by the Pathans for different crimes such as adultery. It is a known fact that adultery is not permissible. It is considered illegal and immoral. There is punishment for it.

The narratives written by the British during the colonial period reflect various images of the tribals. They construct the tribals as the 'Other' of the British civilized self. And naturally, it becomes the white man's burden to civilize these people. This

attitude has been reflected in their writings over and over again. Tribal India for the British is something interesting, exotic and strange. Hence, it becomes a subject for them to be studied for various reasons. They adopt the typical manner of the colonial ethnographers, fixing the stereotypes in a timeless present. Mary Louis Pratt, in her study of colonial representation, sums up this tendency brilliantly:

> The portrait of manners and customs is a normalizing discourse, whose work is to codify difference, to fix the 'Other' in a timeless present where all 'his'actions and reactions are repetitious of 'his' normal habits [...] He is *a suigeneris* configuration, often only a list of features set in a temporal order different from that of the perceiving and speaking subject. (Pratt 120-21)

These narratives also reflect the contemptuous and negative attitude of the British towards most tribes. Nevertheless, some tribes are seen as loyal and benevolent, and as easily tamed. The Anglo-Indian writers' attitude towards the tribals is that of 'alienation' and 'exclusion' of the 'Other,' a criterion to be placed either to assert British superiority in terms of culture and civilization or to show the tribals as a sharp contrast to the 'rational civilized' being of the colonizer. The tribals are also viewed as a race that is to be eulogized for its 'pristine innocence' 'animism' and intimacy with nature and natural things—a thing of beauty which should not be allowed to be disrupted by civilizing forces. They are also seen as a race that is degenerate, and the British are cast in the role of their saviour. The 'civilizing

mission' of the British highlights the poverty, belief in unscientific things, magic etc of the tribals. The hierarchical positioning is evident in all these perspectives.

In conclusion this brief exploration of the writings of Kipling, Elwin and Masters points to the implication of these writers in colonial rule. One would expect this from them—primarily because of their participation in British rule, which by its very definition demarcated the colonizer from the indigenous colonized. It would be interesting to see whether Indian English writers are in any way different from the Anglo-Indian writers or whether they also have the same 'superior' outlook towards the tribals. The next chapter discusses the narratives in English written by Indian writers.

Chapter 4

Tribal India in Indian English Fiction:

The Tribal as Primitive, Loyal and Brave

As mentioned in the introduction, Indian English writers generally come from the elite section of the society and deal with general themes confronting the nation and society. Tribal India is the 'other world' for them. We hardly find Indian English novels based on this theme. Nevertheless, a few Indian English writers have dealt with the theme of Tribal India in their writings. Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* (1969) Manohar Malgonkar's *The Princes* (1963) Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra* (1993) and Ruskin Bond's short stories are a few examples of work that deals with different aspects of Tribal India. This chapter makes a study of these narratives in order to understand their representations of Tribal India.

Arun Joshi has produced a few novels that are highly valued. Because of the quality of his work he occupies an important position as an Indian English novelist. Joshi comes from a distinguished family. He was born at Benaras on July 7, 1939. His father Professor A.C. Joshi was the Vice-Chancellor of Panjab University and later became the Vice-Chancellor of Benaras Hindu University. Arun Joshi passed his B.S. from Kansas University, USA in 1959 and M.S from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA in 1960. After his studies, Joshi joined the Delhi Cloth & General Mills Company as Chief of its Recruitment and Training Department in 1961. He

simultaneously held the positions of the Head of the DCM Corporate Performance Assessment Cell, that of the Secretary of DCM Board of Management, and that of the Executive Director, Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources. He resigned from DCM in 1965 but he continued to be the Executive Director of Sri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources. He was also associated with Sri Ram Centre for Art and Culture and Hindu College, Delhi as Member of their Governing Bodies. After 1965, he set up his own industries. In 1979, at the invitation of the East-West Centre, he participated in the World Writers' Conference held at Honolulu, Hawaii, USA. In 1988, he won the Sahitya Akademi award.

As a writer he has made a significant contribution to the world of Indian English Fiction. He has written four important novels and a dozen short stories. *The Foreigner* (1968) is Joshi's first novel. It received both critical acclaim and disapprobation in India and abroad, but ultimately established Joshi in the front rank of Indian English fiction writers. The novel relates how Sindi (Surinder) Oberoi, an immigrant Indian, suffers in his quest for the meaning and purpose in his life. His novel *The Apprentice* (1974) is a stark exposure of the sordid social corruption, and a powerful indictment of the tyranny of bureaucratic organization that depersonalizes man and stifles his humanity. It is also a cry of the human conscience in the sick Indian social microcosm. Joshi's *The Last Labyrinth* (1982) illumines with a fresher perspective on some aspects of the earlier novels. It explores the dilemma of existence with greater intensity and against a wider backdrop of experiences and relationships. All of Joshi's novels deal with the theme of alienation.

The novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) revolves around Bimal (Billy) Biswas and his encounter with the tribals. The story has been narrated by Billy's friend Romesh Sahai. Billy Biswas is the son of a Supreme Court judge. He is sent by his father to the United States to study Engineering. However, he studies anthropology there. He reads books on tribal attitudes and customs and gets immensely interested in the tribes described in them. Billy's interest in the tribals goes back to his youth. At the age of fourteen, he had a strange experience at Bhubaneswar. When he watched a tribal dance he felt that he belonged to that tribe, and became obsessed with the culture of the tribal people.

In America, Billy comes across a Swedish girl called Tuula. Billy and Tuula are very good friends and share many intimate moments together. Tuula understands that Billy is interested in the primitive world. After some years, Billy comes back to India and joins Delhi University as a Professor of Anthropology. During this period, he undertakes a number of expeditions to investigate primitive communities. Sometime later, he decides to marry Meena, a sophisticated and very beautiful girl from his Bengali community, but this marriage turns out to be unsuccessful.

On one of the expeditions to a hilly region of Madhya Pradesh, Billy mysteriously vanishes, leaving his wife, his beautiful child and his parents behind. A great search is launched by the police, but they fail to locate him. The police declare that Billy has been killed by a tiger in the deep forests. Ten years after his

disappearance, Billy meets Romesh Sahai, who is a District Collector now and who is on a tour of the Maikala Range. Romi sees Billy wearing a loincloth and nothing else. At this point, Billy discloses some of his experiences during these ten years to Romi, and tells him how he hates the so-called civilized world.

Billy's wife and father come to know about Billy being alive through Romi's conversation with Situ, and move the police force to locate Billy in the forests, despite Romi's efforts to save Billy from the police. In the confusion that follows the search, Billy is shot down by a policeman.

The novel has attracted the attention of a number of critics. Notable among them are D. Prempati, Hari Mohan Prasad, R. K. Dhawan and O.P. Bhatnagar. In an essay "The Art and Vision of Arun Joshi," O.P. Bhatnagar says that Billy is a new type of character in the whole range of Indo-English fiction. He is not the stereotype of a traditional Indian hero spouting wisdom through philosophical speculations, but a character with metaphysical dimensions. He makes no cowardly compromises nor has pity for himself. He has a strong will and determination. He feels a passionate resentment against modern Indian society. He is a man of conviction, capable of turning his vision into reality. R. K Dhawan in his essay "The Fictional World of Arun Joshi" points out that Joshi's novel is a revelation of a world where man is confronted by the self and the question of his existence. Dhawan adds that "Joshi seeks a process of the apprehension of reality which may lead him to the world of the core of the truth of man's life. He realizes man's uniqueness and loneliness in an

indifferent and inscrutable universe"(17). D. Prempati in his essay "*The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*: A Serious Response to a Big Challenge" says that in the novel Joshi seems to be mediating between New Delhi and the Satpura Hills, between two different cultures. Hari Mohan Prasad in his essay "The Primitive Pilgrim" says that the novel is important in two ways: (1) It is explicated as an indictment of the phoney, hot-shot, sordid, modern culture; and (2) it is an embodiment of *Purush-Prakriti* unification. It will be apparent from a consideration of these views that all of them are focused on the existential themes in the novel. The issue of the representation of the tribals has been largely ignored by these critics. Here, our attempt will be to concentrate on the representation of the primitive or the tribal people.

It is imperative at this point to dwell upon the notion of primitiveness in brief. Billy Biswas is obsessed with primitiveness. His obsession is a result of his dislike for modern civilization. Primitivity is something that is considered the opposite of modernity or as something which is pre-modern. In this context what Michael Bell says provides a context for an understanding of Billy's attitudes. As Bell points out: "primitivity is dauntingly ancient and characterized with a correspondingly wide range of manifestations"(1). It refers to the classical concept of the golden age: the first state of innocence, before man knew how to sin. If we look at the development of this concept we find that primitivism and the popular fashion of admiration for the 'noble savage' began in the Eighteenth century. As mentioned in the third chapter, Rousseau preferred the natural man to his civilized counterpart. Some of Rousseau's ideas are present in the poems by Goldsmith in which he evokes the idyllic and the

pastoral world. The poet laments the growth of trade, the demand for luxuries and the mercantile spirit. As we see in the novel, Billy's idea of primitiveness is that it is opposed to civilization. He studies anthropology to explore the world of primitivism. Anthropology, in principle, advocates an equal interest in societies of all types. But here it has been reduced to the study of primitive society. In addition to anthropology, Billy reads the *National Geographic Magazine*, which has a coverage of the tribal treatises on black magic, witchcraft and so on. It should be noted here that anthropology as a discipline is itself the product of colonialism, and was set up with the aim of studying primitive society for better administration and has a record of describing them as exotic and as the 'Other.' In the same manner, *The National Geographic Magazine* also has negative things to say about the tribals. In their book *Reading National Geographic* (1930), Lutz and Collins have commented that this magazine portrays the tribals as " 'exotic,' 'idealized,' 'naturalized,' and 'sexualized' " (qtd. in Manganaro 207).

Influenced by his strong obsession, Billy goes into the tribal society. Before he disappears he writes to Tuula mentioning the strange obsession that he has about the tribal woman who appears in his dreams. The concrete form of the tribal woman is Bilasia, whom he meets in the Maikal region. As a part of his search for primitive culture and his desire to be with them, Billy marries Bilasia. Billy's action reminds one of Verrier Elwin, who in a similar way went into the tribal society and married twice into the tribal community. The first marriage to a Gond woman was unsuccessful, but later he married a Pardhan woman by whom he had two sons. This

was part of Elwin's attempt to be one with the tribals and to participate in their life. About his obsession Billy writes:

> A strange woman keeps crossing my dreams. I have seen her on the streets of Delhi, nursing a child in the shade of a tree or hauling stone for a rich man's house. I have seen her buying bangles at a fair. I have seen her shadow at a tribal dance, and I have seen her, pensive and inviolable, her clothes clinging to her wet body, beside a tank in Benaras. And once I saw her, her face strangely luminous in the twilight, loading a freight train with sulphur on a siding in one of our eastern ports. Yes, this woman keeps crossing my dreams causing in me a fearful disturbance, the full meaning of which I have yet to understand. (Joshi 93)

As mentioned earlier, Bilasia could be viewed as the concrete form of the strange woman Billy used to be obsessed with. Billy penetrates tribal society as an outsider and a benefactor. He cures Bilasia, Dhunia's neice, strikes up a friendship with Dhunia and marries his niece. He forgets his first wife and his son. After marrying Bilasia too he takes her for granted. Billy as a man can choose women but the latter have no freedom to do likewise. After Bilasia has become a good wife Billy wants to go to the next world. Billy sees the tribal woman as exotic, voluptuous and in tune with nature. His celebration of tribal beauty is exemplified in the passage where he describes Bilasia as follows: "I remember the shadows inside and Bilasia in her rust coloured *lugra,* her black hair tied behind her neck, her firm shoulders golden

and bare, the play of the oil lamp lending a voluptuousness to her full figure until the whole hut seemed to be full of her, and only of her" (114). Romi also shares the same perception with Billy about the tribal woman. About Bilasia he says:

> It was three months after I rediscovered Billy and nearly ten years from the night of which Billy was speaking when I first set my eyes on Bilasia. And looking at her I had thought then, as I think now, that it was quite possible that a woman like her could have affected a person of Billy's sensibilities in the manner that she did [...]. She had that untamed beauty that comes to flower only in our primitive people. (140-41)

The popular perception that the tribal woman is beautiful and sensuous is upheld by both Romi and Billy. The tribal woman has been essentialized as a primitive force (138-9). This kind of representation is found in Sunil Janah's photographic book *The Tribals of India: Through the Lens of Sunil Janah* (1993) where the tribal woman's body is celebrated. I have attached a sample in Appendix III. When Billy romanticizes the figure of Bilasia he hardly takes interest in Meena, his married wife. His perception about Meena is quite opposite to the one he has of Bilasia. At this point it is worth noting that Mahasweta Devi's representation of the tribal woman is not romanticized but realistic. We never find them as symbols of sex. We may hardly find the difference in terms of sex between a tribal girl and an urban girl as depicted in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas,* between the tribal Bilasia and the urban woman Meena. However, novelists generally essentialize the tribal and non-tribal women in different ways: the manner in which their qualities are contrasted. An essay: "Figures

for the Unconscious" by Kumkum Sangari is instructive in this regard. Sangari studies the manner in which a tribal woman and a woman from the mainstream society are depicted in relation to each other. She makes a study of two women characters depicted in R.C.Dutt's Bangla novel *Rajput Jiban Sandhya* (1879) translated as *The Last of the Rajputs*. Sangari mentions that in the novel, both Rajput and Bhil women are bound by the spirit of Nationalism, and are presented as equable and uniform. However, when the subject of cultural practice comes up, a strong contrast is built between the tamed and untamed natures of women. Rajput women are particular in guarding their high civilization. They practise *Sati Jauhar*. *Jauhar* comes to be described in colonial anthropology as a developed, reified ancient Rajput ritual. Rajput women form a collectivity typified through the rituals of wifely fidelity and valour and Bhil women are typified through common dress and appearance, and are loosely aggregated and form a collectivity through the performance of manual labour. Where Rajput women are ruled by strong behavioural codes emanating from the sanctity of marriage, Bhil women are subject to more flexible, less confining, but also less highly evolved patriarchal arrangements:

> The women are a little less dark and they are good-looking: for clothing they have a piece of cloth that covers their loins and a single breast; *churis* and anklets made of lac decorate their arms and legs. Their marriage ceremony is very simple. On a fixed day the young men and women of a village meet together; the men pick out the girls they like and retire into the woods where they spend a few days; they then return to the village. (qtd. in Sangari 77)

This contrast becomes more obvious in the choice Tej Singh makes between two women. One is called Pushpa, the garden flower (the name is individualized, but is an embodiment of the wifely fidelity of the Rajput 'race') ,and the Bhil girl is called the wild flower (the unnamed type of enigmatic tribal woman). Both are child-women. Pushpa's marriage is fixed with Tej Singh at a very young age, at the age of seven. But Tej Singh disappears and people believe that he is dead. Pushpa as a Rajput woman takes voluntary widowhood. She assumes the garb of a widow in order to ward off other suitors. She takes patriarchal values innocently on faith, without reasoning. On the other hand, the Bhil girl is presented as both a type of the 'dark' romantic heroine and of a child woman filled with mystery, wisdom, intuition, and gravity. Her sexual attraction is translated into the sportiveness of the child, playing with flowers, watching clouds and lightning, singing in the moonlight. She is also presented as scheming, but the high caste Hindu woman retains her moral ascendancy.

In the same manner, one can examine the way Joshi juxtaposes the tribal girl-Bilasia and Billy's legitimate wife Meena. Meena (Banerjee) comes from a middle class family and shows all the traits of the middle class. She follows a strong behavioural code, and is devoted to her husband. As Sangari points out: "Her repressed kind of sexuality does not have any attraction for Billy. On the other hand, Bilasia the tribal woman is dark, inscrutable, a kind of repository of unrepressed, orgiastic, magical sexuality with therapeutic powers and the 'unconscious' and such a

solution for the urban malaise" (79). It is to be mentioned here that "the tribal women respect their elders and are respected by members of their community and they are not as Joshi perceives them " (Hansdak 43). Billy's vision of the tribal dance is that it is a way out for sexual orgies. He says: "Well, these dances *are* an orgy of sorts"(138). He thinks that their drums have a magnetic and mysterious 'pull.' In contrast, a writer like Mahasweta Devi, who has been involved in tribal culture for a long time, looks at tribal dances differently. She mentions that the tribals dance in order to celebrate and to pray for prosperity in their agriculture. They drink, but not to arouse beastly lust and voluptuousness. In an interesting book for children called *Etoa Munda Won the Battle* (1989), she mentions that the Adivasis of Hathigarh drink because they need a kind of lull after their long irksome work in the fields of Moti Babu.

Billy says that the tribal world is not an organized one. According to him the tribals have no ambition. He comments: "What kept us happy, I suppose, were the same things that have kept all primitives happy through the ages: the earth, the forest, the rainbows, the liquor from the *mahua*, an occasional feast, a lot of dancing and lovemaking, and, more than anything else, no ambition, none at all" (146). It is surprising that a novelist writing about the tribals in the nineteen sixties fails to see any movements or struggles active in the region and portrays the tribals as a quiet and peaceful lot. One also gets the sense that the tribal world as described in the novel is an isolated one, and that there is no connection between the tribals and 'civilized' society. Billy gets into it and appoints himself its saviour—as if the tribals were in

need of Billy's intervention for their well-being. The tribals of the sixties were not isolated totally from the mainstream. They were educated and mobile. They were in different professions such as teaching, law, engineering, etc. They aspired to come out of the clutches of slavery. The tribal youth organized tournaments. They were not without ambitions. Joshi fails to notice all these aspects in their life, and provides only a partial view of tribal life. In sum, as Hansdak points out, the novel fails to portray larger issues, and remains romantic in essence, and "the tribal society is reduced to a picturesque backdrop against which Billy Biswas's tragic destiny is enacted" (67).

Kamala Markandaya's novel *The Coffer Dams* (1969) appeared two years before Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* was published. For Markandaya the tribals are not as primitive as in Joshi's novel. They take part in the construction of a dam. One of the tribals is an engineer. It is necessary to provide here a profile of Markandaya in order to understand her perceptions about tribal people. Kamala Markandaya's domain as a novelist has been both urban and rural India. She has written novels concerning social issues confronting rural India. She has also written on urban life. Her novels help us to look at issues from a woman's point of view.

Kamala Markandaya was born in 1924 in the Mysore State in Southern India. She was educated at various schools in different parts of India since her father was in the Indian Railways. This enabled her to travel widely in India. She joined Madras University and chose History as her major. Then she gave up college studies and

joined a weekly newspaper. Later she joined liaison work for the army. She also spent some time in a village, and that experience inspired her to write the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954). She went to London in 1948. It was in this year that she got married to an Englishman called Mr. Taylor. She lives in London with her husband and their daughter, and makes frequent visits to India.

Markandaya has several novels to her credit. Some of the important ones are *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Coffer Dams* (1969), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Two Virgins* (1973), *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) and *Pleasure City* (1982). It is worth describing each of the above novels briefly to provide a context for my analysis of *The Coffer Dams*.

The novel *Nectar in a Sieve* is the story of a peasant woman, Rukmani, whose rustic life is shattered by the intrusion of industrialization. Markandaya's *Some Inner Fury*, which is set in British India, is the story of a Westernized upper class family torn by a conflict of loyalties. Mira falls in love with an Englishman. Her brother Kitsamy upholds the authority of the British Raj, but another one of her brothers, Govind, seeks to overthrow the Raj through terrorist activities. *A Silence of Desire* expresses the life of the most inarticulate social stratum, the middle class, caught between different values—old and new, Eastern and Western, religious and agnostic. Her novel *Possession* is set in two countries. The protagonist is an artist who is caught in the conflict between his spiritual guru and his worldly benefactress. Lady

Caroline Bell, during one of her visits to India, finds a goatherd called Valmiki, who shows great talent with home-made paints, and whose spiritual mentor is a Swami who lives outside Valmiki's village, in a cave; Caroline whisks Valmiki off to England to nurture his art and brings him, and herself, recognition and fame. She operates with the same dedication and ruthlessness with which the British subjugated India. She moulds him into a man, an artist, and a lover, after the image she has in mind, and in the process ruins him, depleting him of independence and spiritual strength, though in her opinion he gains more than he loses. Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice* is set in rural India. It is about Ravi, a young man who has left the village and come to the city; a drifter by nature, he is made into a traditional householder by his love for a tailor's daughter. *The Nowhere Man* is the story of Srinivas, who acts on his youthful idealism in India's struggle for Independence and pays a heavy price by being expatriated. *Two Virgins* is about Lalitha and her sister Saroja. Lalitha trades away her soul, lured by city splendours, and Saroja watches, learns her lesson and returns to the bosom of Mother Nature. *The Golden Honeycomb* is a historical romance. It is the story of a family of Maharajas who ruled a Native state for three generations; and with the instrument of accession, had to confront the merger of the Princely State with the Indian Union. Markandaya's last novel *Pleasure City* is about a love story between Tully, an English girl and Rikki, an Indian boy. Their relationship fails as Tully leaves for England and Rikki is left alone on the threshold of manhood, and there is no suggestion that he will survive.

A close look at these works reflects a number of common themes in Markandaya's novels. The recurring ones are: social issues, the racial encounter, and the problems of women. Though the novel *The Coffer Dams* deals with all these issues, the theme of tribal people is also significant. As the story of the novel unfolds, we find that Clinton, the head of a large British engineering firm, begins the construction, aided by Indian technicians and tribal labour. The area selected is called Malnad. Clinton's young wife Helen has boundless curiosity about the country and its people, and her rapport with them puzzles, and then irritates her husband. He is conditioned by memories of the colonial past, while she has no such inhibitions. Bashiam, a tribal engineer, introduces Helen to the fascinations of the jungle, to his own simple tribe, and to his own capacity to attract her. He becomes her lover. Helen also meets the tribal chief, who becomes angry at the exploitation of his people the construction company, and criticizes their easy surrender to materialism. While all those involved in the work ought to be united in the common goal of harnessing a river, the irony is that racial tension, born of the years of imperialism, simmers just below the surface, and sometimes boils over into open conflict.

Clinton is determined to finish the work on time and despite pleas for caution, he steps up the pace. The Coffer Dams are almost completed, but unless they are fully completed, the monsoon would destroy a whole year's work and carry away a slice of the reputation of Clinton's Mackendrick Company. The rains have already started in the upper reaches of the mountain range, leaving them four days in which to pour the last pillar of cement. Four days of round-the-clock work would complete it. At this

juncture there is an accident in which about forty workers are killed, two of them by being jammed between boulders. The workers, led by Krishnan, demand that the bodies be retrieved, defying Clinton, who had decided on incorporating bodies and boulders into the last span of the coffer dams, rather than spend or 'waste' time blasting underwater so as to release the bodies. The workers are adamant, because they have a precedent. In an earlier accident, the fatalities had been British, and the bodies had been rescued at the risk of sinking the boat. Clinton chafes at the delay caused by the rescue. At this point Mackendrick brings the news that Bashiam has volunteered to try to lift the boulder and release the corpses. Clinton turns off the safety load indicator and releases the bodies by making the crane lift weight beyond its limits. The jib breaks and Bashiam is crushed hip down in his driver's cage. Clinton writes his report with no mention of the faulty lugs. But his conscience tears him apart. There is a rift between Clinton and Helen. She drifts away from him because he lacks certain qualities she thinks essential in a human being.

The novel can be read at various levels—as a text showing the life of the tribal people with the advent of modernization, or as a story of racial encounter, as a text of conflict between nature and industrialization, or as a text based on feminist ideas. However, our focus will be on the portrayal of the tribal people ('aboriginal people' as Kamala Markandaya calls them) in the novel. If for Arun Joshi the jungle inhabitated by the tribal people is calm and quiet, it is not the same for Markandaya. Writing about the tribals around the same time, she finds them resisting the construction of the dams. However, the tribals are not in the forefront. Their voice has

been articulated by the non-tribal leaders. An important tribal character in the novel is Bashiam. He is an engineer by profession, assisting Clinton in the construction project. Though born as a tribal, he is different from his fellow men. Markandaya describes him as follows:

> He was not like the others.... He had been born in these hills, had followed the traditional craft of woodcutting until they began building the hydro-electric station, further up the river, uprooting his family, indeed his whole village, to do so. Bashiam had gone back out of curiosity, and stayed, spellbound by the workings of the strange powerful turbines. A discerning foreman had given him employment, and in the course of it he had learnt about electricity and machines, about building and repairing and dismantling, welding his new learning on to an older, part-inherited knowledge of forest and river and hill-country seasons. It was this older knowledge that inhibited him, prevented him falling in line with the others. (23)

The fact that Bashiam studies engineering, becomes an engineer and takes part in the process of building the dam is significant. In spite of his tribal origins (usually thought of as being far from modernity), he takes active part in the progress and modernization of his region. Through this Markandaya perhaps indicates that the tribal people should embrace the change and modernization which was initiated by Nehru soon after Independence. Markandaya's message for the tribals is not to resist, but to be part of the modernization process. In the novel one notes that the tribals are not vehement in opposing the construction of the dam though there is some kind of

dissatisfaction among them against the construction. Bashiam as an employee is loyal to Clinton, but he is not subservient. Here, for Markandaya, Bashiam is a loyal servant and a devoted learner. He takes interest in his work and picks up a lot of things about technology which his own people are ignorant of. Acquiring the knowledge of technology is something that the author finds unique in a tribal, and she is eager to highlight this aspect. Because of this exposure, Bashiam is able to mingle with the 'high class' people.

The relationship between Bashiam and Helen is an interesting subject for analysis. Helen wants somebody to interpret the culture and people to her. Bashiam comes to her mind. As Markandaya puts it:

> Bashiam, the hill-man whom they called jungly wallah, or even more disparagingly the *civilised* jungly wallah. He became her link-man, providing the information she sought of a country and a people who intrigued her, whetting a curiosity with which she had always been liberally endowed. The curiosity grew with each encounter: no longer satisfied with watching, but wanting to know: entry achieved, now seeking performance. (44)

Gradually Helen is attracted towards Bashiam and that relationship turns into intimacy. Part of Helen's attraction for Bashiam is his 'exotic' nature. Markandaya perhaps wants to set up a different kind of relationship between the outsider and the tribal. In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, it is Billy who comes as an outsider to the tribal society and falls in love with Bilasia, a tribal girl. In Markandaya's novel by

contrast, it is the woman who initiates the relationship. In both cases, however, the outsiders enter the tribal world to serve their own purpose. Thus, Helen moves gradually into the tribals' lives; she is sincere about her curiosity, sometimes a little impatient with them. Because of this relationship Bashiam invites Clinton's anger, contempt and irritation. As the novelist points out:

> Bashiam seemed to him to be riddled with fears, in thrall to the spirits of forest and rain like the hill-tribesman he still was at heart. Even the other Indians kept him apart, a stranger in their midst, calling him jungly wallah as he had taken to doing. Jungly wallah: a man of the jungle. A primitive just come down off the trees. Englishman and Hindu alike looked down their fine aryan noses and covertly spurned the aborigine. (23-24)

Bashiam is also an outsider in his own tribal society—he hears his own people describe him as being de-tribalized. Sometimes, without undue agonizing he acknowledges the truth of it. He also knows in his bones that however de-tribalized he might be, birth and upbringing within the tribe gave him race knowledge and instincts that could never have been acquired by any one else. That is why they come to him, the delvers after knowledge, accessible as he is because of his English, asking him questions and recording his answers in notebooks or on tape. Bashiam is also uprooted from his own people and culture. His people do not consider him to be one of them. As Markandaya puts it:

> To his tribe he was a man who walked alone, sprung from them but no longer belonging, a man who put shoes on his feet and worked machines, whose feelings and desires they could not fathom. Until one day the headman saw him at the edge of the encampment looking like a strayed animal, and ordered a hut to be built for him, believing he would not know how to do it for himself. They planned it a little apart from theirs, out of consideration, straining their minds to think as he might. (131)

Thus, making Bashiam content with his origins, Markandaya reinforces his tribal identity and shows Bashiam his own place. This also shows the writer's own attitude towards the tribal people. As a writer with progressive attitudes, perhaps Markandaya expects Bashiam not to forget his own people and tribal identity, and yet work for the progress of his region and people. But one is disappointed to see the way Bashiam acts. All that Bashiam gets is the status of a loyal servant. It is to be noted that Bashiam does not assume leadership. He feels happy that he is able to love Helen, a white who is his boss's wife. He volunteers to lift the boulder because he feels for Clinton whose wife he has been courting. This shows that Bashiam is loyal but not subservient, and this loyalty results in his destruction.

The third novelist I have chosen is Manohar Malgonkar. He depicts a different picture of the tribals in his novel *The Princes* (1963). Set Central India, the novel shows power relations between the erstwhile Maharaja and the tribals. Manohar

Malgonkar, like Arun Joshi, is not involved with tribal activism. In this respect, he and Joshi are different from Mahasweta Devi who is deeply involved. However, for Malgonkar tribals are not alien. As a hunter and politician he has observed them and mingled with them. As a writer Malgonkar has an important place in Indian literature in English, with more than ten novels, three collections of short stories, three histories, three works of non-fiction, and a play. He has been well appreciated by a number of reputed critics and creative writers. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar compliments Malgonkar for "his sound historical sense" (434). Speaking about Malgonkar's novels, M.K.Naik in his celebrated work *A History of Indian English Literature* (1982) comments that " Malgonkar's novels are neatly constructed and entertainingly told" (217). Malgonkar's novels are conceived on a large scale, they are full of action. They are exciting stories. They are also valuable documents for our purpose.

Of his ten novels, the novels that merit serious literary consideration are: *Distant Drum* (1960), *Combat of Shadows* (1962), *The Princes* (1963), *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964). His *A Spy in Amber* (1971) was originally a screenplay, which his daughter subsequently drafted into a novel. *The Devil's Wind* (1972) is a historical novel based on Nana Saheb. *Open Season* (1978) was written originally as a film story and later made into a novel; and *Bandicoot Run* (1982) is a detective story. *The Garland Keepers* (1986) is another popular novel.

Manohar Malgonkar was born in Bombay on July 12, 1913. His family comes from a village called Jabalpet in Belgaum district of Karnataka where they had lived

for generations. They were Marathi-speaking and land-holding Brahmins. He went to school between 1919 and 1931. Then he joined Bombay University and studied English and Sanskrit as Honours subjects from 1931 to 1935. Malgonkar dabbled in various professions and activities like hunting, tea plantation, politics, and the military before he joined the ranks of professional writers. He joined the British Indian Army and left it before long. He turned to politics and contested elections to the Indian Parliament twice—in 1957 and 1962—as a Swatantra Party candidate, but lost both times. Malgonkar's fiction reveals a sound historical sense and an involvement in social and political problems.

In his first novel, *Distant Drum*, Malgonkar presents aspects of army life in India during the period of transition, from the last years of the British regime to the first years of Congress rule. His second novel, *Combat of Shadows* is set in a tea estate in Assam, and presents a picture of the life of the British officials, the Eurasians and the labourers in the tea estate. The novel *A Bend in the Ganges* highlights the issues which breed conflict between Indian Nationalism and British colonialism. It deals with the conflict between Hindus and Muslims, which supersedes the fight for freedom from British rule. The ultimate outcome of the double conflict is both freedom and division of the country. The scenes of violence, killings in cities, villages and streets, the shame and defeat at the hour of freedom, all feature in the novel.

The Devil's Wind represents the complex theme of the national experience of the Revolt of 1857. Projecting Nana Saheb, the historical figure, as the protagonist, the novel is a response and a counter to the colonial portrait of Nana Saheb. Malgonkar's most recent novel *The Garland Keepers* (1986) is based on the Emergency (1975-77). It depicts the violation of human rights and the gross abuse of power by the Government. Though designed on a political theme, it acquires distinction on account of the author's quest for truth, individual liberty and social justice. Thus, Malgonkar's novels largely deal with historical and political dynamics in India. The tribal issue figures in only one of his novels, *The Princes.*

The Princes depicts the dilemma and anxieties of the Maharaja of Begwad around the time of Independence. When the proposal for the merger of the Princely State comes, the ruler is reluctant to accept the proposal. On the other hand, the Congress is insistent on this issue. The Congress as well as the Maharaja seek the support of the tribals, the Maharaja appealing to their traditional loyalty. The Congress, however, fails to get tribal support in spite of its attempt to lure the tribals with its attractive plans of building dams and other modernizing programmes. The tribals show their loyalty to the Maharaja. However, in the end the Maharaja has to succumb to the pressure of the Government and ultimately the State is merged into the Indian Union.

The relationship between the Maharaja and the tribals is very peculiar. Abhay, the Maharaja's son and narrator, feels that the tribals have been kept in the dark to

prove the Maharaja's supremacy. They are not allowed to get the benefits of civilization or be assertive. As he points out, the relationship between the ruler and the people is a kind of "mystic [or] ritualistic bond" (92). It is the only influence that holds the turbulent people together.

It is true that the king's treasury is in Bulwara where the tribals live, but ironically the tribals living around the treasury have no light of civilization. Abhay rightly points out: "As we approached, we passed small groups of men and women going towards the camp, all almost naked except for little wisps of cloth around their middles, the men wearing twists of coloured rope for turbans and the women chains of flowers on their heads"(95).

The tribals, in spite of their poverty and illiteracy, support the Maharaja. They do not want an ordinary person like Gour Babu to rule them in spite of the fact that he promises to do a lot of things for them. The Maharaja however enjoys their support and recognizes them as his great weapon against the nationalists led by the Congress. Abhay comments:

> this was the first time I became aware of them [tribals] as a force, as a race of hunters who had barely settled down as farmers and who live by instincts and emotions and a few tribal laws and closer to the bronze age than to ours. And it was at this time too that I began to understand why my father had always regarded them as his special responsibility. (Malgonkar 96)

The Maharaja perceives the tribals as emotional and innocent and takes advantage of their loyalty. The view that tribals are emotional people and can be easily won over is a popular notion in mainstream society. A number of films also reinforce this image in the portrayal of the tribals. For instance in a Hindi film *Daulat Ki Jung* or *Battle for Wealth*, the hero and heroine are captured by a cannibalistic tribe who sing and dance as a preparation for human sacrifice. However, the clever city people deceive the tribals and escape. In actual fact, the tribals are not innocent and meek followers. They had a history of leading important struggles, and they had a number of leaders among them such as Birsa Munda led the tribals with a sense of independence and dignity. However, the stereotypical common perception about the tribals is what the Maharaja carries with him. He greets the tribals and declares his support, service and solidarity, and tries to be one with them. In a symbolic gesture he wears their rope turban, removing his own, and greets them with the expression "Julay" which means both 'greetings' and 'farewell' as well as 'all right' and 'thank you' and 'well done' (96). This practice is carried on even by our politicians today. They go to the tribal regions once in five years and wear tribal headgears and tribal costumes, and make false attempts to greet them in their dialects in order to lure them for their votes. Malgonkar who has an uncanny sense of history and social attitudes, alludes to this in his portrayal of the Maharaja and his attitude towards the tribals.

The Maharaja patronizes the tribals and takes their side when he is in need. He speaks for the tribals. He likes them because they are loyal. They support him in his fight against the 'nationalists.' Therefore they are "'un-spoilt' and 'magnificent people'" (96). The Maharaja's patronizing attitude is best expressed in the following words:

> Wonderful people, loyal and brave [...]. And they are fighting men. And this is their country, almost as it was since time began. We don't want to take it away from them for the sake of putting up factories and mills somewhere, generating electricity. They would have felt uprooted, sold like slaves—six hundred rupees per head or a patch of irrigated land. I left it to them. The choice was theirs. (101)

However, according to Abhay, the choice was not theirs, but it was the Maharaja's. As Abhay narrates: "They were swayed by sentiment alone, sentiment such as a man like my father was capable of evoking in them" (101). This shows that the Maharaja is not sincere in his relationship with the tribals.

The issue of deciding and speaking for the tribals is relevant even today as we come across different agencies speaking on behalf of the tribals and making attempts to bring them to their fold. The conversion programme of the Christian missionaries, the Hinduisation process of the right wing political workers, and the radical left's attempt to brainwash the tribal youth into taking up arms, are a few cases in point. All of them, including political parties, are busy in bringing them into their fold, but they don't bother to find out what the tribals really need. The tribals' point of view is

largely ignored by these agencies. That the tribals ought to be given freedom to decide for themselves instead of somebody from outside deciding for them, is Malgonkar's implication.

Whereas Billy's relationship with the tribals in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is seen as an act of intervention and advantageous to him, in Gita Mehta's novel *A River Sutra* we see the tribal initiative in a similar kind of relationship. Like the above mentioned novelists, Gita Mehta also comes from an elite family. She was born in Delhi in 1943. She is the daughter of Biju Patnaik, a famous freedom fighter who later became the major political leader of the Eastern state of Orissa. Mehta was educated in India and the United Kingdom. While attending Cambridge University, she met a fellow student Aajai Singh whom she married. Currently they maintain their residences in New York, London and Delhi, spending at least three months every year in India.

Mehta has two important novels—*Raj* (1989) and *A River Sutra* (1993)—and a few prose works to her credit. Among these, *Karma Cola* (1980) is very popular. It is a series of interconnected essays, weaving Mehta's own impressions of India's mysticism with the impressions she gathers through other people. Ultimately it becomes a satire on the major wave of foreigners who began swarming into India in the 60s in search of India's Karmic powers. Gita Mehta blends humour with witty observations, constructing a book that presents her own impressions interwoven with the experiences of many others. *Raj* (1989) is a thorough and colourful historical

story that follows the progression of a young woman born into Indian nobility under the British Raj. Through young Jaya Singh's story, Mehta's readers are shown a glimpse of the passage of Princely India's early struggle for independence as it affected a small segment of high-culture society. *Snakes and Ladders* is another collection of essays about India since independence. It is her most widely read work. Her purpose is to make modern India accessible to Westerners and to a whole generation of Indians who have no idea what happened 25 years ago, before they were born. In addition to writing, Mehta has also spent time as a journalist and directed several documentaries on India for BBC and NBC. She has made four films on Bangladesh. She has also made films on elections in the former Indian princely states. Because of this journalistic background, all her books feature keen political insight founded in thorough investigation. Her novels largely depict the hollowness of the spiritual and political mode of life of the modern man. Her novel *A River Sutra* (1993) is set on the banks of the river Narmada. The narrator, a retired bureaucrat, decides to spend the rest of his life on the banks of the river. He takes up the job of a Manager of the Government rest house and lives a life in search of tranquility. Here he meets several people—a girl fleeing her kidnapper, a naked ascetic and a child who is rescued from prostitution, a teacher who confesses to murder, a millionaire monk, and a musician silenced by desire. There are small tribal villages near the rest house. The narrator describes the village and its villagers thus:

> Our bungalow guards are hired from Vano village and enjoy a reputation for fierceness as descendants of the tribal races that held the Aryan invasion of India at bay for centuries in these hills. Indeed, the

> Vano village deity is a stone image of a half-woman with the full breasts of a fertility symbol but the torso of a coiled snake, because the tribals believe they once ruled a great snake kingdom until they were defeated by the gods of the Aryans. (Mehta 6)

One particular day a constable comes and asks the narrator to come to the Police Station and meet a young boy (Nitin Bose) who carries the narrator's address. The boy is possessed and has attempted suicide in the river. The narrator goes and meets the boy who happens to be his ex-colleague's nephew. The narrator reads his diary, and one section of the book titled the "Executive's Story" is based on the life of an executive and his encounter with the tribals.

From Nitin's diary, the narrator learns about his encounter with the tribals. From the diary one learns that Nitin Bose is a young executive who had been appointed in the tea estate. He falls in love with a tribal woman during his stay at the estate. Later, his company calls him back to Calcutta. However, he finds it difficult to live without the woman. He becomes insane and wants to take refuge in the Narmada.

Nitin Bose, like Billy Biswas, is disgusted with urban life. He dislikes the monotony and artificiality of modern life. He seeks an alternative way of life. So he goes to the tea estate in Assam. He is unlike Billy who wants to mingle with the tribals, giving up his civilized costumes. Nitin goes with power and authority to administer them. The tribal woman Rima is attracted to Nitin who has all the

attributes of power. Nitin, without enquiring about her marital status and social background, seduces her. According to Nitin: "Her body encircled mine like a flowering creeper grips a tree [...] then a lower voice asked, 'why did you not send for me earlier'" (124). The last sentence reveals that it is not Nitin who falls in love but that the tribal woman has been brought to Nitin, the Manager. However, Nitin points out that "she seduces me with tribal songs" (126). The urban educated Nitin has the ability to write down his diary and articulate himself, whereas the tribal woman cannot. Later, after coming to know that the woman with whom he has made love is a Coolie's wife, he feels disgusted. He wants to compensate her loss. One needs to note the power configurations in this relationship. Because Nitin has power and possession, he can use them to woo Rima and he can give her up when he feels like doing so, whereas the tribal woman has no say in her own life. She has to just obey her master, that is, Nitin Bose the manager. Here the tribal woman has been portrayed as a seductress. Her voluptuous sexual behaviour has been highlighted by the writer. The writer also reinforces the stereotype ascribed to the people of this region. She intends to say through Nitin's diary that women of this region have no inhibition about sex. Nitin says this about Rima: "Like a magician she drew me into a subterranean world of dream, her body teaching mine the passing of the seasons, the secret rhythms of nature, until I understood why my grandfather's books called these hills 'Kamarupa,' the Kingdom of the God of Love" (128-128).

Ruskin Bond, who could be included in the list of Indian writers in English, has an interesting story depicting the tribals. Bond is generally not included in the

class of above-mentioned writers as he has an Anglo-Indian origin, and as he lives a quiet life in the Himalayan Hills. Unlike them he does not go out of his way to rub shoulders with the literary elite. However, he is very popular among the young readers and is classed with Indian English writers like R K Narayan, Manoj Das and others. Ruskin Bond was born in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh, in 1934, and grew up in Jamnagara, Dehradun and Shimla. In the course of a writing career spanning more than thirty-five years, he has written over a hundred short stories, essays, novels and thirty odd novels for children. *The Room on the Roof* (1951) was Bond's first novel, written when he was seventeen. The book received the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize in 1957. *Vagrants in the Valley* was also written by him when he was in his teens. This novel was a sequel to the *Room on the Roof.* Bond's novel *The Flight of Pigeons* was made into a film called *Junoon*. Three of Bond's short story collections have been particularly popular among readers: *The Night Train at Deoli*, *Time Stops at Shamli* and *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* and many of his short stories from these collections have been included in school text books.

The story " The Tiger in the Tunnel" is a story generally included in school textbooks. It is about a tribal family in the hilly regions of Uttar Pradesh. Baldeo, the protagonist of the story is a tribal watchman. He works in a small railway station and lives in a hut near it leaving behind his family in his village. His son Tembu who is twelve years old looks after the family and visits his father occasionally. Baldeo's work is to give the signal to the night mail train. One night, after lighting the lamp, Baldeo is waiting for the train near the tunnel when he encounters a tiger. Baldeo

fights the tiger very bravely with his axe and is killed in the process. The tiger is wounded. Later, the wounded tiger is cut down by the incoming mail and the villagers happily feast on the tiger's flesh. After two days of mourning, Tembu takes up the job of his father and shoulders the responsibility of the family.

Baldeao and Tembu have been presented as real human beings and not as exotic characters or as figures of fun. Their commitment to their work is emphasized, and their bravery and loyalty is stressed. However, while it is true that the novelist does not portray them as figures of fun, he nevertheless depicts them in ideal terms, and perhaps romanticizes them.

Indian English novelists are perhaps blighted by their very use of English and an air of inauthenticity often affects their writings, and this could be said of the novelists considered in this chapter. The novelists discussed above are all talented and the novels themselves are aesthetically pleasing, but from a political or ideological perspective one notices that they seem to repeat with some variations the stereotyping indulged in by the Anglo-Indian novelists discussed in Chapter3. We shall now move on to a consideration of Indian novelists who treat of the tribal question in Indian languages, available to us in English translation, where presumably the fact that these are novelists who use Indian languages might just possibly lead to greater authenticity.

Chapter 5

Tribal India in Indian Fiction in Translation-I

Tribals as Children of Nature: Gopinath Mohanty

This chapter begins with a discussion of the dominant cultural factors that conditioned Oriya fiction in the early 20th century, especially the forces that enabled the theme of marginality to be written about, and then places Gopinath Mohanty in the context of the fiction-writing tradition in Orissa; and finally it discusses in detail some of his important novels on tribal themes in order to understand his representation of the tribal people.

I

With the taking over of Orissa by the British from the Mahratthas in 1903, a number of changes appeared in the socio-cultural life of the people. The British administration strengthened the feudal system. The feudal class acted as the mediator between the British and the people. The feudal lords collected taxes for the British. They were exploitative in their dealings with the common people. Though they were loyal to their British masters, they were very unkind to the common people. There were revolts against feudal exploitation such as the Paika revolt. But these were suppressed, though the suppression did not last long. The rise of the common people against their oppressors was strengthened with ideas supporting their cause which came from different corners of the world. The ideology of communism was one such

influence. In 1901 Queen Victoria passed away, and with her death the rich and feudal lords lost their power, possessions, and patronage. This gave rise to the emergent labour class. The labour class became powerful. The British were ruling Orissa through local landlords. So, with the weakening of British power, the landlords also became weak in terms of exercising their power. As a result, the common people gained some confidence to articulate themselves. At this juncture, people's revolts such as the October Revolution of 1917, and the World Peace Congress (October 6, 1935) were events that provided inspiration for the writers and leaders who supported the common people. In this connection, Brahmananda Singh writes: "Bhagabati Panigrahi, the veteran Communist leader who attended the Peace Congress in Paris, organized a week-long Seminar in Orissa after he came back from the World Peace Congress. He called it the Nabayuga Sahitya Sansad" (55). Freedom of thought and liberalism were the key concepts here. Six months later in1936, the All India Progressive Writers Association held its meeting in Lucknow and there was an urge for purposeful writing. In his inaugural address at the All India Progressive Writers Conference, Munshi Premchand "insisted on the need for socially purposeful writing. Lamenting the soporific quality that dominated the then current writing in Hindi and Urdu, he pleaded for a literature that would generate dynamism, struggle and uneasiness (*gati, sangharsha aur bechaini*)"(Mukherjee 145). He said: "By progress we refer to that condition which creates in us strength and vigour, which makes us aware of our misery, which enables us to analyse the internal and external factors that have reduced us to the present state of inertia, and which attempts to remedy them"(qtd. in Mukherjee 146). There was also an urge to focus attention on

neglected sections of our society. Munshi Premchand himself wrote novels and many short stories on the lives of ordinary people. Peasants, labourers, widows and other marginalized sections of the society formed important characters in his novels and short stories. Along with Premchand, other novelists, such as K. A. Abbas, Mulk Raj Anand, and Thakazhi S. Pillai also wrote on the life of the marginalized. Gopinath Mohanty, a student of literature in his formative years was undeniably influenced by these ideas. Mahatma Gandhi's call for social justice was another influence on Mohanty. Throbbing with these ideas, he made bold to represent tribals in his novels and stories, which was a daring and unusual step in the field of Oriya fiction. Explaining how he came to write on the tribals, he points out:

> The plight of the simple, innocent, but exploited poor tribals moved me deeply. At the same time I felt a compelling curiosity to study them and their culture as they seemed to represent for me an ancient stage of human civilization with much that was of sterling worth, least inhibited, and least sophisticated. The more I saw them, the more I liked them. I mixed with them, and I picked up their dialects. (Mohanty, "Himself"8)

Mohanty's concern and appreciation for tribal life and culture gave birth to a whole corpus of literature on them. Mohanty has as many as five novels based on different tribes. It is worth discussing them in chronological order in order to understand how Mohanty's perception of tribal people was shaped over a period of time. But before that, it is pertinent here to look at the life and concerns of Mohanty's writings.

II

Gopinath Mohanty was born in a village called Nagbali near Cuttack on 20th April 1914. He was the ninth and the youngest child in the family. His elder brother Kanhucharan Mohanty was also a novelist. Gopinath's father Suryamani Mohanty worked for the Maharaja of Sonepur. Gopinath stayed with his father and had his schooling at Sonepur. This was his first exposure to the Western and Southern parts of Orissa where most of his novels on the tribals are set. He completed his schooling there. There is an anecdote as to how he dreamt of writing Oriya classics. Once Gopinath's niece Shanti teased him saying: "Do you have novels in Oriya like that of Bankim Chandra and Rabindranath?"(Singh 13). Gopinath was hurt by this charge and asked his father to get some good Oriya novels for him. His father got a few novels of Fakir Mohan Senapati. But they were not enough for Gopinath and he wanted more. His father seemed to have said "whatever existed, I have got them for you. If you want more, you can write and add"(13). From this, a dream to write took shape in his mind.

In 1926 Mohanty left Sonepur and took admission in Patna High School in the Bangla section. He read the Bangla classics and was inspired by the Bengal Renaissance. He also read a number of Hindi and English writers, and then decided to write a number of novels and short stories to bring Oriya literature to the fore. He started writing when he was in the ninth standard. He stood first in an essay

competition in Patna High School in 1927, and then he developed interest in literary studies. He passed his matriculation in 1930 and took admission in Ravenshaw College, Cuttack. During his college days, he used to edit two handwritten magazines called *Urmi* ('wave') and *Jagarana* ('awareness') and a magazine in English called *Desklark*. During this period he was also associated with editing other magazines such as *Adhunik,* and *Yugabartha*. He secured an M. A. in English literature and was inspired by the writings of Samuel Richardson, Virginia Woolf, F.R. Leavis and G.K. Chesterton. Gopinath passed his M.A. in the first division. He had a desire to join the Indian Civil Service, but this did not materialize. Then finally he joined the State Administrative Service as a Sub Deputy Magistrate in 1938 in Jajpur district. As a Magistrate, he helped people at the time of floods and other natural calamities. Mohanty pursued his interest in literature even as an administrator. He knew what was lacking in the Oriya novel and thought about ways of infusing freshness into it. He knew that Oriya literature was mostly in the genre of poetry, and that there was a lack of prose writings, particularly fictional prose. Fakir Mohan used the colloquial language, but in him there was lack of finer shades. Mohanty felt an urge to merge the dialects that were prevalent in different parts of Orissa with the 'standard' Oriya language. Apart from this, there were other influences on him as well. These may be discussed briefly.

The call of the times and social consciousness inspired his expression. As an administrator, he lived in several tribal regions and was involved with various developmental projects. Thus he observed from close quarters the language and

culture of the neglected people and the way they were exploited. He points out in an interview:

> The special advantage in my life was I had travelled and had been travelling. Big mountains, thick forests, tigers, snakes, elephants, rivers, forest malaria, dead bodies, deaths caused by accidents, combination of fear and beauty; storm, cold, heat, rain, thunderstorm, darkness, forest fire, flood water in different seasons—all these I could acquire not from books, not by hearing but from my living experience of life. I have experienced by travelling and added to my life. (Mohanty, *Pragna* 35)

Mohanty wrote as many as fifteen novels between 1938 and 1974. He was given the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1955 for his novel *Amrutara Santana* (1949) or *Sons of the Immortal* and also the Jnanpith Award in 1974 for his *Mati Matala* (1946) or *The Clay*.

At the start of his career as a Deputy Magistrate at Jajpur he used to help in rescue operations for the flood-affected people. Then he came to work in the tribal regions where he got materials for many of his novels. Mohanty was also influenced by the political movements that emerged in different parts of the world. There were movements in 1789 in France and in 1917 in Russia to overthrow the old values and to establish People's Revolution. In South Africa there was a prolonged struggle to overthrow colonial rule and to establish human dignity, social identity and economic rights. The aim of these movements was to bring the oppressed people to the mainstream. Literature and art also highlighted the life and culture of common

people. This concern for the life and culture of the marginalized was reflected in Indian literature as well. Writers such as Munshi Premchand, Fakir Mohan Senapati, Thakazhi S.Pillai and others made efforts to highlight the life of the common people. Mohanty wrote his novels in the realistic mode following in the footsteps of Fakir Mohan Senapati. However, realism can never be anything but an approximation of the reality. The writer's background and his ideology do play an important role in the making of the novel. In this regard Raymond Williams says:

> We know now that we literally create the world we see, and that it is a human creation—a discovery of how we live in the material world we inhabit—is necessarily dynamic and active. Reality, in our terms, is that which human beings make common, by work of language. Thus in the very acts of perception and communication, this practical interaction of what is personally seen, interpreted and organized and what can be socially reorganized, known and formed is richly and subtly manifested. (288)

Gopinath Mohanty took the bold step of including the life of tribal people in the domain of his novels. Before Mohanty, the Oriya novel was more or less confined to the coastal region. With Mohanty's novels, the range of Oriya fiction was enlarged and became more inclusive. Bibhuti Patnaik rightly points out that Gopinath Mohanty could be called the appropriate representative of Oriya fiction because his writings represent the whole of Orissa. This aspect of his writing makes Mohanty different from his contemporaries. Mayadhar Mansingh, the noted literary historian describes

him as a "path-breaker" (268). It is really surprising to note that though tribal people constitute about 25% of the total population, and have made contributions to the history, art, literature and culture of the state, they have been ignored by earlier writers. Only a couple of them have written about the tribal people. Gopala Ballabha Das's *Bhima Bhuiyan* (1908) and Kanhu Charana Mohanty's *Bana Gahana Tale* (1944) are two instances in this regard. The following section attempts a brief survey of these novels.

III

Gopala Ballabha Das's *Bhima Bhuiyan* (1908), which is the third Oriya novel—the first and second being Umesh Chandra Sarkar's *Padmamali* (1888) and Ram Sankar Ray's *Bibashini*(1891)—was on a tribal character Bhima Bhuiyan. However, it was not as powerful as Mohanty's fiction. The tribal theme found visibility only after Gopinath Mohanty's novels on tribal people appeared. With Gopinath Mohanty, the theme gained greater visibility in Oriya literary circles, but a quick consideration of *Bhima Bhuiyan* is worthwhile. It is a different type of novel. The writer writing in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century had a different notion about the tribal people. It is worth discussing Das's views on the tribal people and his representation of the tribals.

Gopala Ballabha Das was the younger brother of Madhusudan Das. Madhusudan Das, also known as 'Madhu Babu,' was instrumental in the formation of

Orissa state. He was one of the pioneers of Oriya language and literature. He is called 'Utkala Gouraba' or the Pride of Orissa. Gopala Ballabha Das himself was a notable writer. He was born in 1860 in Satyabhamapur, Cuttack. He was an administrator. He spent some years in the Princely State of Keonjhar. The Prince of the state was a minor, so Das was appointed the Superintendent of the State. Here he came into contact with the Bhuiyan tribe of the state and was inspired to write a novel about them. 'Bhuiyan' is the name of a tribal community predominantly inhabiting the Keonjhar region. The king of Keonjhar used to select Sardars from this tribe. The Bhuiyans were respected by other people. It is a fact that they have joined the mainstream now and don't identify themselves as tribals, but during British rule, the Bhuiyans were termed as loyal subjects. There was a tradition that at the time of the coronation of the prince, the Bhuiyans would carry him on their shoulders and place him on the throne and then alone would the coronation take place. After this the king would tie turbans on the heads of the Sardars.

As the story unfolds, we find that Sadhu Sardar has two sons—Banasura and Bhima. They are well built and good-natured. They are good archers and enterprising. They have a good reputation in the entire region. Chinamali is a beautiful Bhuiyan girl of the same region. She is beautiful and of good nature. Banasura and Bhima are attracted towards Chinamali. Finally it is decided that Banasura would be marrying Chinamali. Once the Minister Chhamu Patnaik comes to Sadhu's village and asks Sadhu to let his son Bhima come with him to the palace to work for the king. Sadhu is very happy to go and stay in the palace. After some days, Sadhu and his elder son—

Banasura are brought to the palace as prisoners for some reason. Bhima is very sad to see his father and elder brother as prisoners. Some time later, the king falls ill. So, nobody is allowed to enter the palace. Doctors are called, but no one is able to cure him. When Bhima comes to know about it, he volunteers to get an old man who can cure the king. The old man cures the king and the latter regains his health. The king's daughter, who is very upset about her father's health, is pleased with Bhima. She develops a kind of love for him which he reciprocates. Bhima is also pleased with the Princess. The king after his recovery wants to honour the old man who has cured him. He asks him to bring him to the palace. Bhima brings the old man. People who are present there see that the old man is none else but Bhima's father who is a prisoner and has to be hanged. They inform the king about it. The king asks the three of them (Bhima, Bhima's brother and father) to decide who is to be hanged. But they are not able to decide. Meanwhile the Princess comes and requests the king to release all three of them. The king does so and all three of them are free. Then the festive season comes. Every one is busy merrymaking. The king meets his daughter. He comes to know that she has been upset for some reason. One of her maids informs the king that the Princess wants Bhima to be honoured and decorated with turbans, etc. She also desires that Bhima should go out of the palace, and she adds that she likes to visit Brindavan. The king asks Bhima to be present and tells him that since there is no war he can decide what to do. Bhima says that he would like to go back to his father and brother. The Princess asks him to remove the 'Ranjit-turban' from his head. When he removes it, the Princess puts her jewel on Bhima's forehead and offers herself as his wife. Everyone including the king is happy.

The novel was written much before social realism became a trend in Oriya fiction, a trend ushered by Fakir Mohan Senapati. Hence it does not bear any strong features of socially conscious writing. The tribals are depicted here as people living happy and jolly lives as subjects of the King, and not as citizens. As we read the novel, we feel that we are reading a fairy tale narrated by the author. The novel is narrated by the author, and we hardly find characters engaged in dialogue. It is to be noted that in *Bhima Bhuiyan* male characters are given a prominent place. There are no significant tribal women characters. The author does not employ the idiom of the Bhuiyan tribe in order to make it realistic. He uses polished and pure Oriya. He even makes the tribals speak in refined Oriya. Madhusudan Das for example congratulated his brother on using "pure and elegant diction redolent of the homely sweetness of Oriya undefiled as also of the dignity of classical speech, and above all, the supremely wise spirit of reverence and clarity [...]"(Das iv). This may be called a fairy tale romance, but not a novel, a precious tale, genteel and proper, but not a realistic depiction of the larger and profounder aspects of tribal life.

Kanhu Charan Mohanty (Gopinath Mohanty's brother), another significant novelist in Oriya also wrote a novel based on the tribal theme. The novel *Bana Gahana Tale* (1944) which can be rendered as *On the Foothill of Thick Mountains* was written around the same time as Gopinath Mohanty wrote his novels on the tribals. However, Kanhu Charan's novel has not drawn much critical attention as compared to Gopinath's. The reason might be that Kanhu Charan had only one novel

on the tribals though he wrote many significant ones on other themes. Gopinath on the other hand has as many as five novels and a wealth of material on tribal life, culture and language. He also devoted a long span of his life to their service.

The novel *Bana Gahana Tale* is set in a Kondh village in the Koraput region. Magta is Milika Naik's son. He is proud because his father is the Naik or headman of Kinam village. He loves Suna. Suna is Jani's daughter. However, Suna loves Baya, who is a poor young boy but has a good character. He has lost his father. Lata loves Magta. But Magta is not liked by a 'Domb' called Buddhi because the latter is ill-treated by Magta. Budhi comes from a low caste family, and is very revengeful. When Magta tries to court Suna, Budhi tells Magta's father that his son should not marry Suna. On the other hand he advises him to get his son married to Lata. Though Lata is interested in Magta, the latter is not willing to marry Lata but wants Suna to be his wife. Suna on the other hand is interested in Baya. Baya is poor but wants to marry Suna who is higher in status. After much discussion both Baya and Suna decide to run away from the village and build a house in the forest. Budhi, who has been listening to their plan, advises them not to run away leaving their ancestral homes. He also says that if Baya obeys the former, he can marry Suna and can become a Jani. Then Budhi asks Baya to come with him to accompany him in stealing from Banamali Sahukar's house. Baya gets some money and ornaments from stealing. Baya and Suna run away. Budhia also runs away fast. Then they see a number of people coming towards them. Among them are the Munsi Babu (Sub-Inspector of Police), a Constable, Jani, Naika, Disari, Magta, Budhi, Sukru, Chaitu

and Banamali Sahukar. Banamali Sahukar says that the ornaments worn by Suna belong to him. Suna says that all of them were given by Baya and Baya says that that all of them were stolen and given to him by Budhi. Suna gives back all the ornaments and Baya is arrested. The villagers ask Magta to marry Suna . Suna is married to Magta, but she is not happy. She is often beaten up by Magta when he comes home drunk. Suna is blessed with a child. One day she is sitting on the verandah. Lata comes to meet Suna. Then Baya comes back from jail and comes to meet Suna and take revenge on Magta. Suna tells Magta that if he waits for her at a particular spot, she would tell him something. Baya waits for Suna. Suna gives her child to Lata and goes to meet Magta. She says that she has come back to live with him, and both of them run away. Lata has to live with Magta and the child. Anyway, the child belongs to Magta.

The novel can be read at three levels. It is about the love relationships between Baya, Suna, Magta and about social practices prevailing in their community. The author highlights the practice of choosing one's life partner and getting social sanction later. This the author finds strange as it does not prevail in his own society. The novel also lays bare newly introduced institutions such as the judicial system which are corrupt in nature. This narrative, like *Bhima Bhuiyan* is a tale of love and is melodramatic in nature, and deals with tribal life at a superficial level. It is Gopinath Mohanty's novels on the tribals that give testimony to the writer's efforts to combine involvement with the tribal people and artistic endeavour.

IV

Gopinath Mohanty's first novel on tribal life is *Dadi Budha* (1944). It has been translated as *The Ancestor*. 'Dadi' in Paraja language means 'grandfather' and 'Budha' also means 'grandfather' in Kondh language. If we combine the two, we are combining both the Kondh and Paraja languages. For the tribal people of this region, Dadi Budha is the ultimate primal ancestor. He is the cause of creation and destruction. So, the people of Lulla village have established him as their deity through their priests, heads and Naiks. A date palm tree is cut and on the top of it, they wrap a white cloth which looks like a turban. They cut twenty-one marks on the tree and put different colours on the marks. This is their Dadi Budha, the presiding deity of the village. Dadi Budha is their immediate God.

Dadi Budha observes the moving human beings in silence and does not do any harm. But the primitive tribe can see a lot of energy in that mute, static tree. He is the saviour of the village and the community. He is responsible for the loss and gain of everyone. The people hold him in fear and veneration. In the morning people pay their respect while going to the river. He can cure a sick child and can restore a lost cow. He can cause fruits to grow in the garden. He is the eternal deity. Sometimes infants die, cows are stolen. But they have no control over it. The tribals blame their fate. They sulk before Dadi Budha but still retain faith in him, because they are human beings and he is the presiding diety.

Saria Dan and Sariaphool both offer flowers to get Thenga Jani. But Thenga Jani runs away to Assam with Santosh Kumari, a Domb girl. Thenga's father gets some consolation in Dadi Budha. It was also because of Dadi Budha that Sunduri Paraja's son gets cured. His power is supreme, but it works in mysterious ways. Later in the Lulla village a tiger appears. This, of course, is a common event. People run away leaving the village. Dadi Budha who has been a support in the time of suffering and difficulties does not come to their rescue. There has been an anthill near the Dadi Budha. The anthill covers Dadi Buddha and they merge together.

Here, Mohanty conveys the message that man is more important than beliefs and rituals. As a writer in the humanist tradition, Mohanty believed that man is the centre of all activities. As the saint poet Chandidas would say:

> Listen, O brother.
>
> Man is the greatest truth.
>
> Nothing beyond.
>
> (qtd.in Mehta, *A River* vii)

Here because of the humanist ideology of the novelist, he undermines the tribal beliefs and rituals. But for the tribals these rituals may be very significant. These can even be more important than human life itself. This also indicates Mohanty's concerns for the disintegration of tribal harmony. He hints that misfortune falls on the tribal village because Thenga Jani fled with Santosh Kumari, the Christian Domb girl, breaking social norms.

Though *The Ancestor* has a simple story line, it presents different aspects of tribal life like love, sex, marriage, communal feasts and drinks, beliefs and worship, certain social codes, and institutions, which are shown as important. This novel has been compared with Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) by Arun K. Mohanty who finds a number of similarities between them. According to him both the novels deal with social realities. In both cases personal tragedy is interfaced with public tragedy. The Ibo community in *Things Fall Apart* and the tribals of Lulla village in *The Ancestor* are affected by outside influences. As a result they disintegrate. However, there is a major difference between the two novels. Achebe belongs to the community he writes about, whereas Mohanty is an outsider writing about tribal life. It remains a big question whether an outsider viewing the impact of external influences on the tribal society can itself be taken as interference. Here Mohanty's view as an outsider comes out prominently. He believes that tribal culture should not be affected by outside culture. As a government official he believed that government machinery should take up the responsibility of developing the standard of tribal life. As a socialist, he saw some kind of conspiracy in the religion of the then rulers. He comments on their preaching and adds:

> The formless heavenly God carried the burden of all our sins—that's fine. That was a piece of good news. He could forgive all of us. He would bear the burden on his shoulders. However one led one's life, all sins could be wiped off in his blood some day or other. (Mohanty, *The Ancestor* 32)

Mohanty found this ridiculous. Tribals who have been exploited throughout their lives are assured by the preachers that their sins will be forgiven. Mohanty perhaps felt that what the tribals really wanted was not sermons or absolution from original sin, but justice and basic needs. Because the missionaries ignored the basic problems, he ridicules them in several places. The activities of the missionaries may sound ridiculous to Mohanty, but it is important to consider their contributions to the underprivileged in matters of healthcare and education. It is also important to see what leads the tribals to take up another faith. Mohanty's perspectives on the tribals as an outsider becomes more evident when we discuss his famous novel *Paraja.* Written in 1943 and published in Oriya in 1946, *Paraja* has a larger canvas. Apart from tribal faiths and customs, this novel depicts the tragedy of a tribal family which becomes dehumanized because of exploitation and oppression. It is based on the 'Paraja' tribe living in Patangi and Jaypur Taluk of Koraput district.

Sukru Jani lives in a jungle village called Sarsupadar with his two sons (Tikra and Mandia) and two daughters (Jili and Bili). Their only support is a piece of land near the river and it is like gold. They love it very much. Sukru's wife has died ten years earlier, killed by a tiger. Sukru lives a happy life with his sons and daughters. He dreams that Mandia will marry Kajodi and Jili will marry Bagla. But his world is shattered all of a sudden once the forest guard sees Jili bathing in the river. He is attracted by her beauty and wants to seduce her. He sends Kau Paraja to get Jili for him for a night. When Kau tries to convey this to Sukru, the latter is very angry. For him, dignity is more important than anything else. Mohanty writes: "Sukru Jani let

out a roar like an infuriated animal. 'You'll get what you deserve, you rascal,' he shrieked.' I'll break every bone in your body. Just wait, and I'll skin you alive, you scum!'" (Mohanty, *Paraja* 29). When Kau Paraja tries to explain the power that the forest guard has and the consequence of disobeying him, Sukru reacts angrily: "What nonsense is this? [...] Yes, I know your Forest Guard is so powerful he can crush all of us. But why must that sal tree pick my poor Jili [...]?"(30). Sukru beats up Kau Paraja and sends him back. There is a contrast here between the so-called civilized man's desire and his deceptive nature and the innocence of the tribal. The forest guard out of revenge levels false charges against Sukru Jani for cutting down trees and levies a fine, non-payment of which would mean imprisonment. Nobody comes to Sukru's rescue. So, Sukru and Tikra work as 'gotis' (serfs) for Ramachandra Bisoi the moneylender who gives them a loan in return.

Sukru is free of deception. He does not realize the Sahukar's plot. He gains courage to take the loan. Then Mandia is arrested on a charge of distilling liquor. He also becomes a 'goti' under the Sahukar as he borrows fifty rupees from him. Sukru's misery does not end there. Mandia's lover Kajodi goes away with Bagla. Jili submits herself to a road contractor.

With many difficulties, Sukru is released from his 'gotihood' but only by mortgaging his land. He picks up courage to fight adversity. All of them want the land back. They express their desire to get it back. The Sahukar (moneylender) gets angry and refuses. Then they seek the help of the law court. But the Sahukar,

Ramachandra Bisoi uses his tricks and money and thwarts them. As a result they return empty-handed. Then they seek help in the court again to request the Sahukar to release the land. The Sahukar instead, rebukes them. They get extremely angry and cut off the Sahukar's head. Thereafter they go to the *thana babu* (Sub-Inspector of Police) with the head to tell him that they have killed the Sahukar and that they are ready to accept punishment.

Mohanty is critical of the capitalist economy interfering with the tribal way of life. He feels that it kills the social and communal ethos of the tribal community and culture. According to him, with the entry of the outsiders, the tribal world gets disintegrated. He shows sympathy for the blissful innocence of tribal existence, but he is not nostalgic like Verrier Elwin who wanted to see the garden of Eden in tribal society. Unlike Elwin, Mohanty does not exoticise the tribal world, and recognizes the problems and difficulties faced by them in different spheres of life. However, Mohanty disapproves of modern society coming in and causing disintegration. This has been his constant concern in almost all his novels on the tribals. In *The Ancestor* it is suggested that because Thenga Jani goes away with Santosh Kumari to Assam, misfortune befalls Lulla village. In *Paraja,* it is with the advent of the outsiders such as the forest guard, the moneylender and the contractor that Sukru Jani's peaceful world is disturbed. About Mohanty's view on this B. K. Das, the translator rightly points out:

> We know then that the disapproving eyes are dangerously near; the end is at hand. The gradual corrosion of innocence by a creeping,

> crawling, lurking evil is as maddening as any modern method of torture: it not only destroys but debases and humiliates. The contrast between natural and man-made calamity is glaring. Sukru Jani's wife, Sombari, we are told, was dragged away one day by a man-eating tiger as she collected dry twigs in the forest. Sukru Jani suffers, but for him this event is comprehensible: it is a part of his life. What he cannot comprehend, however, is the infinitely convoluted process by which he and his children are transformed from free men into '*gotis*' or serfs, bound to the Sahukar (moneylender) for ever. He cannot comprehend why a man should be arrested and fined for cutting down trees in the jungle. (vii)

Mohanty paints a contrast between life before the advent of outsiders and life after their entry into the tribal world and holds them responsible for the degradation and disintegration of the tranquil tribal society. For instance, look at the way Mohanty narrates Sukru's life before it was affected by the outsiders:

> Sukru Jani lives in 'Paraja Street.' He has his hut and his small family, and he lives in peace. His needs are simple: a bowl of *mandia* gruel every morning and again in the evening, and a strip of cloth of four fingers wide to wrap around his loins—and these he never lacked. (Mohanty, *Paraja* 2)

But life is difficult afterwards. Jili and Bili live a life of want and deprivation. This is depicted in the following passage:

> Jili sat on a low mound in front of her hut, gazing into the night sky, forgetful of her existence. Bili crept up softly behind her and put a hand on her shoulder.
>
> 'Come to bed, sister,' she said softly. And Jili got up and followed her into the hut, while the sounds of the night still called to her.
>
> Several months had passed since their father and brothers had left home. At first, life had been easy; the mandia had already been harvested, and there was enough food. When the meal had been cooked, there was time enough to wander off into the forest and join the dance in the evening. There was no cause for anxiety.
>
> But then the stores of mandia and paddy, kept in the attic above the ceiling, ran low. This was a development which no one had foreseen. (114-115)

Mohanty further describes Jili's plight:

> She was filled with a sense of shame. For the first time in her life, she understood poverty. She wanted to hide herself and her misery, melt away into some dark corner, away from the pitiless glare of a hundred inquisitive eyes which pried into the privacy of her hut, turning up pots and pans, raking up her rags, looking into the attic where the grain had once been, searching among the few sticks they possessed. And those eyes pierced through the mud walls and the straw thatch, exposing all her disgrace; they scorched her dry, leaving

> her stark and leafless, like the bare trees on the hillside in summer. (118)

Mohanty also perhaps indicates that there is a change in values even in the tribal mind as the capitalist, individualist economic system creeps into the self-sufficient, communal economy of the tribals. Sukru is ambitious to possess land, he realizes the wants and feels despair as a consequence.

According to Mohanty, the entry of the outsiders into the tribal world signals disintegration. The forest guard is an outsider. He is also an agent of a government institution imposed on the tribals. Here, Mohanty helps us to see how the forest laws caused disaster to the tribals. Before the law was imposed, the tribals had easy access to the forest. It was their means of livelihood. But with the introduction of the forest law in 1871, the tribals not only lost their means of livelihood but were affected by other problems that arose because of this law. E.V. Ramakrishnan points out the adverse effects of the western model of development on the tribals:

> Our obsessive pursuit of a western model of development seems to assume that one day we shall catch up with the west and then would all live happily ever after. The story of colonial intervention, which altered the patterns of agriculture, displaced indigenous communities and bred inequalities between various regions within the country has been told over and over again. It is a tragic story from which we have not learned any lesson. This inability to reorient ourselves towards a more enlightened, eco-friendly model of development has a great deal

> to do with the nature of institutions we have built in the postcolonial era.(qtd. in Hansdak 8-9)

The tribals' right to the forest was taken away by these new rules. The tribals were seen as destroyers of forests and not their protectors. In this novel, Mohanty's role as an administrator can be seen when he describes Sukru Jani's dream: "how nice it would be if these these trees could be cut down and the ground completely cleared and made ready to raise our crops. [...] Why should there be forests, when they mean nothing to us, and not crops? .... God created all these lands for human beings—what a shame that man prevents his fellow men from putting them to their proper use!" (Mohanty, *Paraja* 22-23). Mohanty comments: "Sukru Jani knew nothing of soil conservation or the danger of destroying forests. Such considerations never entered his head. He was concerned with the present and with small personal interests" (23). When Sukru Jani plans to cut down trees, Mohanty as an administrator lays stress on forest conservation. However, his notion of tribals as destroyers of forests may be difficult for us to digest, as we know that tribals believe in living in harmony with nature, and that they know how to make judicious use of forest wealth. In the novel itself one can note that Sukru is very unhappy when the Sahukar plants oranges in Sukru's field as this causes damage to the land meant for growing rice.

As in *Paraja*, Mohanty's concerns about disintegration of tribal society caused by the outsiders are also found in his novel *The Ancestor*. The Lulla village faces disintegration because of the elopement of the headman's son Thenga Jani with

a Christian girl Santosh Kumari. Thenga Jani, the only son of Ramachandra Muduli, the headman of Lulla village, is betrothed to a beautiful girl Saria Daan, the only daughter of Hari Jani, a respectable elder of the same community. But Thenga comes into contact with Santosh Kumari, a Christian Domb girl. They fall in love and reject the discipline of the tribal community. They decide to run away to Assam to work on tea estates and plan to build their dream home in a town where the rules of the tribal society do not prevail. Santosh Kumari and Thenga Jani's migration to the Assam tea estate could be seen as an act of dishonouring traditional values. For Mohanty, one of the visible symbols of the external force responsible for the disintegration of tribal societies is the Christian church. He ridicules missionaries who are engaged in desecrating the tribal gods. As we see in the novel, there is a church in Koraput, where people assemble to listen to sermons which they hardly understand. But they remember the church tower, where the bell rings. There is a priest named Reverend Solomon at Pindapadar village who supervises the activities of the missionaries. About them Mohanty says:

> In the scorching heat the missionaries in black coats moved from one village to another preaching the message of Christianity. They sweated profusely, and their feet were blistered. Whenever they came across someone they would preach to him the message of their religion: Have faith in God, the Almighty, who sent his favorite son to wipe out the evil from the earth; have faith in Him alone. (Mohanty, *Ancestor* 32)

Mohanty, as an administrator, believed in the socio-economic development of the tribals. So he finds it ridiculous when the missionaries give them mere sermons. However, as Ivy Imogene Hansdak points out: "The genuine content of the Christian missionaries' work among the lower-caste groups in India, is [...] negated by the author" (49).

Tribals and non-tribals in the novel have been presented as opposed to each other. The tribals such as Sukru Jani and his sons are shown as dark muscular figures. Sukru's physique is described as "a mass of bulging muscles; his calves are as hard as rock and his bare skin is proof against all weather" (*Paraja* 6). Again Bagla is "like a straight and tall saal tree" (16). Mohanty's perception of the tribals seems to be stereotypical. His idealization of the tribals is also a contributory factor in describing the tribal this way. The non-tribals on the other hand are portrayed in negative terms. The Sahukar's "thick, drooping moustaches, deepset eyes" have been highlighted (*Paraja* 48). Madhu Ghasi's "thick lips and pink eyes" are also stressed by the novelist (255). Mohanty also characterizes the tribals as naïve, simple and sometimes helpless creatures. However, the Dombs have been represented as cunning and crafty people. Chamru Domb deals in illicit liquor by bribing the excise officials, Madhu Ghasi gets Domb and tribal women for the Sahukar. The subalterns also hold this opinion against each other. Sukru Jani points out that the Dombs are suitable for selling their bodies. So the Forest Guard should send men to procure Domb women instead of sending for his daughter. He says: "The Dombs would feel flattered if the Forest Guard asked for their women! Go and try your luck with them!" (30). It is a

mighty irony in the novel that it is precisely the same kind of corrosion and degradation of the same girl, Jili, which the father had angrily resisted, that led to the beginning of the downfall of the family. And the contemplation of this irony produces a kind of sadness that is not easily shaken off with songs, though songs and funny scenes are not wanting in the novel. The Parajas look down upon the Dombs. The Sahukar is said to have "some low Domb blood" in his veins since he is lecherous and cunning. These subalterns, as Tanika Sarkar points out, "have internalized the ideologies of the dominant class/caste" (Sarkar 152-153). The Christian Dombs are also portrayed as cunning and ridiculous. They are described as people who will stop at nothing to get their work done. Hansdak points out that "[t]his attitude towards the Dombs seems to reflect the author's own caste prejudices" (Hansdak 14). Mohanty as an administrator does not like to recognize the genuine work done by the missionaries. The tribals and caste people have been living a life of harmony and cooperation for ages. However, they clash against one another. The administrators play a major role in this conflict.

Like men, tribal women are depicted as sensuous and their bodies have been romanticized. Also their nudity and lovemaking are given undue importance. The descriptions of Jili and Bili are cases in point. Mohanty makes the novel interesting by depicting love and courtship scenes. He describes the dormitory system prevalent among the tribals. This dormitory system is viewed as a space for lovemaking for the writer. S. C. Roy, however, in his studies of the dormitory system—in *The Mundas and Their Country* (1970)—mentions that the system provides opportunities for the

tribal youth to learn traits and skills from their peers, and it is not merely a space for primeval love and sensuality. Love is accidental, secondary, and not the main thing.

Mohanty has a great liking for tribal society and culture, and he would like to see its culture flourish. He perceives that the penetration of the outside world may cause irreparable damage to tribal society. He shows how a harmonious and peaceful society goes through transition in terms of customs and values with the entry of an alien culture and with the introduction of alien institutions like the court, 'thana' etc. As an administrator he sees from close quarters the manner in which government officials exploit the tribals. Mohanty in an artistic style creates an ideal tribal world with songs, dances, love and courtship, exploitation and revenge. Bikram Das has preserved this style in his translation, and the novel becomes interesting to English readers.

Mohanty's love for the ideal tribal world has come alive in his novel *Amrutara Santana* (1947)—which can be rendered in English as *The Sons of the Immortal*—where the tribals have been glorified as the sons of the immortal. While *Paraja* tells a moving story of Paraja life, *Amrutara Santana* tells the story of the Kandhas (also referred to as Kondhs by anthropologists), another aboriginal tribe of Orissa. Unlike *Paraja*, *Amrutara Santana* is not a story of the simplicity and exploitation of the tribes, but explores the mind of the Kandhas living in the wilderness of the forest with their own faiths and social institutions. Like Sukru Jani in *Paraja*, Sarabu Saonta is the patriarch of a small family. He lives in Miniyapayu village. He passes away after some time leaving behind his younger brother, Lenju

Kandha, son Diyudu, daughter-in-law Puyu, and daughter Pubuli. All of them live a happy life in the hills that are at a height of 4000 ft. Pubuli is betrothed to Harguna, but she develops an intimacy with Besu Kandha and marries him without social rites. Sarabu's son Diyudu is a married young man. He is no more attracted to his wife Puyu as she has lost her youth and charm after giving birth to Hakina. So, Diyudu is attracted to Pioti, a young and beautiful girl of another village called Bandikar. One night, leaving behind his wife and son, he goes to that village, marries Pioti and comes back home with the new bride in the early hours of dawn. At this Puyu becomes jealous of the co-wife and weeps bitterly as she finds that her husband loves her no more.

The novelist has added a few more characters such as Lenju Kandha, Phatiru Bejuni, Sona Dei and Pandru Disari. Lenju Kandha is broken man after his elder brother's death. He is not able to put up with his nephew's behaviour. He finds himself excommunicated and alienated. There is nobody for him. He is overcome by self-pity. He is rejected by Suna Dei, the Domb (low-caste) woman.

Thus, the novel has a simple story line, but deals with different aspects of Kandha life. Mohanty attempts to highlight the Kandha philosophy of life. When Puyu is in distress due to her husband's negligence, the Disari, or the priest consoles her by telling her that they are born in nature to make merry. She adds that to a Kandha, the world cannot be woeful. Everybody has a place under the sun and is destined to live a life of joy. Puyu observes nature and finds that a small bird has a nest and a natural dispensation. Such things give her strength and confidence. So she

decides to leave her husband and his house. With her dear son, Hakina, she will have a separate house. She comes to realize that life is immortal, never laden with sorrow and forever pleasant. This is how the novelist attempts to show the tribal world to the reader. Mohanty appreciates the agility of the Kandhas in spite of their economic distress and suffering. This he depicts through the character of Sarabu who plays the flute and remains happy in spite of suffering and distress. Mohanty, coming from an urban background seems to be unhappy with urban culture and has a lot of appreciation for the culture and traditions of the tribal people. This is obvious in a number of places in his novels. Moreover, his appreciation for rural life is obvious in his novel *Mati Matala* (*The Clay*). It is a voluminous work of fiction running to more than a thousand pages; it critiques urban life and celebrates the rural ethos.

Mohanty also highlights some tribal rituals. For instance, when Diyudu's son is born they send the good news to the baby's maternal uncle's family. Then the Disari (the priest) arrives and performs the naming ceremony. Mohanty describes the ritual in elaborate terms. Disari and Bejuni are priests and administrators and controllers of culture. It is believed that the gods listen to their prayers and accept offerings from the devotees. The novel was published after independence and the writer has given more importance to socio-economic aspects of tribal life. He does not speak about the problem of freedom. Though these examples of exploitation, group fighting, etc. may be cited, they are not so obvious in *Amrutara Santana*, as they are found in *Paraja.* In the novel the Kandha is a child of nature; he grows up in

the lap of nature; and he gets inspiration to perform his duty to nature. Instead of becoming violent in order to find meaning in life, he searches for the truth in nature.

Another important aspect of Kandha life is seen in the role played by Bejuni (the priestess). Bejuni is not a person but an institution. She has an important role in different aspects of Kandha life. Mohanty describes Bejuni thus:

> Bejuni's house is at the end of the village. Around the house there is a hedge. Bejuni lives here. She has an important place [in Kandha social life]. She is possessed. She can invoke whatever God she likes to. She is barren. She is a link between life and death. People are scared of her. There are necklaces of many colours around her neck. She has herbal medicine-talismans. She can do impossible things, she can walk in fire, sit on thorns, pierce her belly with a sword. She is the *bahana* (vehicle) of the deity. (Mohanty, *Amrutara Santana* 29-30; translation mine).

The novelist is also impressed by the way the Kandha people conduct meetings and resolve social problems. He highlights the fact that women also participate in these meetings. The novelist also describes religious rituals and ceremonies performed by the Kandhas on different occasions like birth, marriage and death. They drink on these occasions as a part of their rituals. They drink and eat at the time of cutting the navel cord and also perform rituals (9). Human sacrifice is a part of the Kandha rituals. They perform these rituals to satisfy the Mother Earth. As

we see in the novel, witchcraft is another practice that we find among the tribals. Mohanty also narrates the practice of Udalia marriage i.e., if an affair is not approved by parents the couple can flee and live together after paying some penalties to the elders of the community.

In this novel too, Mohanty expresses concern about the decadence of tribal culture. He shows this through Sarabu Saonta who in the beginning of the novel contemplates the sorry plight of the tribals. The novel begins with Sarabu Saonta's death and ends in the final rupture of the marital relationship between Diyudu and Puyu, his son and daughter-in-law. Sarabu is the absent headman whose presence is felt throughout the novel. It needs mentioning that Sarabu is concerned that tribal tradition is suffering from the influence of an alien civilization:

> It was the golden sunshine of the last days of *Pausa*. Eighty-year old Sarabu Saonta leaned against the saal tree at his doorstep and looked at the distance. The air was fragrant with the aroma of unknown forest flowers and 'mahua' wine. Butterflies with multicolored wings floated as lamps in the golden sun. In the distance, at the end of the village street, the worship of *Dhartani* (Earth Mother) had started. Almost the entire village had gathered there. The houses and the village street looked empty. Rhythmic beat of the drum revived memory of his earlier days and Sarabu started reminiscing. He remembered his youth, his songs, the mad abandon of moonlit nights [...]. His entire past

> floated like a dream, like the morning fog slowly unfolding layer after layer of the hills [...] . Sarabu was ill. His whole body ached. There was pain in the chest [...] . Sarabu brought out his flute from the house [...]. Sarabu danced as if he were possessed like the Kalsi or the Bejuni, as if the Nachini Goddess had entered him and he was worshipping the flute and danced. In the honey-coloured afternoon sun, the village dozed; dark shadows danced before his eyes and Sarabu dozed off finally on the most important festival day of the Kondhs. (qtd. in Mahapatra, *Reaching* 1)

Sarabu's illness can be read symbolically as illness suffered by the tribal world or the degradation that has been taking place there. And this concern of Mohanty has been manifested in many different pages and through different characters. For instance, Mohanty mentions how the Kandhas are pushed away by the mainstream. He points out: "Kandha makes a field clearing the forest. Civilization follows him, followed by the moneylender and the white collared officials. They find the land to be good, and make it their own. Kandha moves away and up the hill. Up there too there is the forest, and there is Kandha. Once the land is cleared, Kandha is once again chased out" (Mohanty, *Amrutara* 60; translation mine). He shows his concern for the tribal people and is critical about the people of the plains. Mohanty explains:

> People of the plains think that as long as the Dongria Kondh, the Langia Sabar, and the Kotia Kondh live in this primitive stage, they

> can be easily cheated and exploited. One can buy 96 bananas for 25 paise, a buffalo skin for two rupees and a basket of turmeric for one rupee or two rupees. As the colonialists prepare the tools for exploitation they know how to do it. They push drugs into the market. They get the tribals drunk. They open liquor shops for the tribals. They want the tribals to remain illiterate. Nobody should go and educate them. Only the businessmen should have access to the tribal inhabitants. (15)

In almost all his novels Mohanty is critical of the Domb community. He depicts them as cunning and deceptive. According to Mohanty, the Dombs (a neighbouring low caste community of the Kandhas and Parajas) are among the exploiters of the Kandhas. About a Domb character he writes:

> Barik is from the Domb caste. He is the key to the village. He is the link between the outside business and the villages. He has contempt for the villagers. The villagers want him to work hard and earn instead of just earning his livelihood through mediation and negotiations. He does not want the Kandhas to be educated. He thinks that if the Kandha is educated, he won't need the Domb anymore. (124)

A similar concern has been shown by Mahasweta Devi in her novella "Pterodactyl, Pirtha and Puran Sahay," where Sankar laments the invasion of the outsiders which leads to the miserable plight of the tribals (see p. 191-192 below).

Mohanty is concerned about the outsiders coming to the tribal regions and using them for selfish gains. Unlike Elwin, Mohanty is not an isolationist who would advocate purity of tribal culture. But Mohanty's fear is like that of Mahasweta Devi's that the cunning and selfish people from outside may exploit the tribals and their resources.

In an interview with Sitakant Mahapatra, Mohanty expresses his anxiety and points out: "*Amrutara Santana* deals with the life, culture, problems, and changes of the more primitive Kuvi Kondhs. It also deals with exploitation and with decay of values particularly the havoc wrought by civilization" (Mohanty, "Himself" 11). In the same manner, Mohanty's Sarabu Saonta thinks about the sorry plight of the Kandhas:

> Day by day misfortune goes up. The land on the hill in front has been lost. The Kandhas went further up. There is also everything that belonged to others not of the Kandhas. The yoke and burden is of others. It pains the body and mind. The empire of the Kandha is lost. His country is dispersed and dispossessed. Perhaps people one day will forget that there was something which belonged to the Kandhas. (Mohanty, *Amrutara* 2)

Mohanty shows that the Kandha is free at an individual level and at the same time he is bound by society. Brahmananda Singh in his book *Aupanyasika Gopinatha* (1996) or *The Novelist Gopinath* writes about the Kandhas :

> He [the Kandha] loves freedom, courage, believes in fate, and is conservative in attitude. He does not recognize anyone's lordship. He is selfless. He lives in the uniqueness of nature. He becomes possessed with the advent of spring. He sings for the betterment of all. In every Kandha village, there are institutions like the Saonta, the Jani (head) and Bejuni (midwife) who guide the society. (125; translation mine)

Gopinath Mohanty lived in Koraput during 1940-45 and saw the tribal people from close quarters. He learned humanism and self-respect from them. He also sang *Vande Mataram*, taught Gandhian ideals, Communism and Socialism. The novel *Siba Bhai* (1955) is an outcome of Mohanty's belief in Gandhian ideals. It also shows how Gandhian ideals could spread among the tribal people. One of the important characters in *Siba Bhai* is Apa, or elder sister. She carries forward the ideals of Gandhiji and performs activities suggested by Gandhiji. Apa works for cottage industry, prevention of cow slaughter, abolition of 'Beth' and 'Begar,' preaches cleanliness, abstinence from liquor, use of khadi, and asks parents to send their children to school. These activists operate from Dumriguda Ashram. Siba Bhai's wife Mukta is also an active worker. She does not have a child. So she wants Siba to marry a girl called Parvati and to have children from her. But he refuses to marry again even for the sake of progeny. He wants to devote more time for the movement.

He has a lot of appreciation for his Apa. He devotes his time to spirituality, as he feels that the "soul is more important than anything else. Even if we earn a lot, we should not forget the soul, take the examples of Aurobindo and Gandhi" (Mohanty, *Siba Bhai* 16). Apa does not get married because that would be a hurdle to her work. She teaches in a village school. Biswanath Bhai, another worker, is dead, but his ideals are remembered and invoked by Siba Bhai.

Tima is Siba Bhai's nephew. He advises his nephew also to follow the path of Gandhism. One day Tima and Siba Bhai are out in the forest and Siba Bhai is killed by a tiger. But Siba Bhai is remembered even after his death. His presence is felt throughout the movement as well as in the novel. Apart from Siba Bhai, another person who joins Apa is Jeniffer Mary Wilberforce Hamilton. She is the daughter of a Domb priest called Mathias. She meets Apa and expresses her willingness to join the movement. She changes from her colourful attire to Gandhian Khadi, and gives herself up to social work. She is called Jooni Apa.

Jagannath Bhai is another Gandhian working for the betterment of the local people and helping them to earn their livelihood. It is certainly a difficult task when everyone is crazy for money, and is using false means to exploit people. In that situation, it is not easy to teach them the path of sacrifice, honesty, equality and empathy. But the workers are honest, and Jagannath Bhai eats once a day and fasts in the night, saying that in our country people anyway don't get food to eat twice a day. He wants to show solidarity with them. These activists are charged with

determination. Jagannnatha Bhai is immersed in his work. He requests the people to adhere to the ideals of Vinobha Bhave and Gopabandhu Das. They distribute land, and give up their desire for land in order to enable everyone to get some and live a happy life.

After independence, the top leaders of Indian National Congress started the mission of solidarity and sympathy for the poor in society. Vinoba Bhave took up the leadership. He set up ashrams in different parts of India and involved people in persuading the landholding class to distribute land to the poor. In fact Vinoba Bhave came to Orissa in 1955 to spread his message of Bhoodan ('donation of land') and with his entry, the message spread throughout Orissa. Though *Siba Bhai* was published a little before this, it captures the essence of the Sarvodaya Movement. Started at the national level, Siba Bhai's movement was certainly influenced by it.

The novelist reminds us in the novel that "Vinobha Bhave is moving throughout the country spreading the message of love and non-violence. Along with him, a lot of people are also travelling not for themselves but for the country. There won't be violence, war, disorder and wants." (54). They come from Uttar Baleswar. Sumitra Devi is another activist as also her husband, Budhinath. He has come to this locality all the way from Cuttack to serve these people. The way the activists work is really worth appreciating. As Mohanty narrates:

> Thereafter came a long valley. On both sides there are mountains and in the middle a river, the Kandhas used to cultivate this land some years ago, they have abandoned it for fear of tigers and bears. The land is full of tall grass usually used to make thatches. There are a few sal trees here and there. There is pasture land here. Forests and forests. Jagannath Bhai moves from one village to another. He does not bother whether it is morning or evening, bears, tigers or elephants [...]. In the forest he just wraps a piece of Khadi cloth upto his knee. (Mohanty, *Siba Bhai* 72)

They were Bhoodan activists. Even if Siba Bhai is dead, his presence is felt even after. He used to go with Apa and tell the people: "It is required to distribute among landless. Donate land. If you are four brothers, consider us as the fifth and give us our share. It's a big movement" (19).

It is easy for the outsiders to motivate tribal people. Any movement will spread like fire in the tribal region. The novel shows that Mohanty has a lot of knowledge about the region. He can talk about the village and their landmarks, railway stations, rivers and their peculiarities, belief systems, marriage rituals, songs and dances. This is how Mohanty records the influence of the Gandhian Movement among the tribal people. He narrates how the simple-minded people loyally follow the Gandhian ideals. The workers are also devoted to spreading Gandhian ideals. It is to be noted that he is all for it and records these aspects favourably. Perhaps as an administrator, he is also convinced that these movements and activities are desirable

as they constitute development projects. These he finds better than the proselytization of Christian missionaries. But it is to be noted that it is mainly the outsiders who come and decide what is good for the tribals. It is important to see what the tribals themselves look for. A mark of Mohanty's interiority in tribal matters is his intimate sense of tribal specificity and reality. He mentions even small streams, waterfalls, small villages like Muniguda, Dangsuruda, Chandrapur, etc. in his fiction. This demonstrates his fidelity to place and location, and gives his fiction specificity.

The novel *Siba Bhai* is written in a mode different from that of *Paraja* and *Amrutara Santana.* Unlike the last two, this novel does not focus on the theme of the village and the agricultural life of the tribal people, but on a different theme. It is based on how the mission of Vinoba Bhave has spread in the tribal region. The novelist shows that the tribals embrace the value of equality and universal brotherhood. They embrace this, whereas in the urban and mainstream society it is not so popular. Having examined the strains and stresses in tribal society in the wake of the advance of outsiders, Mohanty shows how the educated tribal youth work for the development of their region. He apprehends that educated tribal youth might forget their own roots and become exploiters themselves instead of serving their own people. This concern of Mohanty has been expressed in the novel *Apahancha* (1961) or *The Unreached.* It is the last of Mohanty's novels on the tribals. After observing tribal society, Mohanty sets an agenda for them to achieve a better life for themselves. The novel *Apahancha* is an instance where he desires that the educated young people from the tribal community should shoulder their responsibilities instead of going

towards cities. This is a critique of the youth who are attracted towards urban life, forgetting their roots. Tima is the young son of Bima Kondh of Melkabai village. While Tima is in school, his father thinks that he will be a great man. Not only his father but also the entire community pin their hopes on him. Tima will come out as a unique person, and he will be great, and save them from suffering, misery and exploitation. The Sahukars won't be able to cheat them. When he is in his High School, he gets his name changed and along with it he changes his dress, and behavior. He passes his matriculation, and then forgets himself. He forgets his language and culture. He gets a job and marries Rajani the daughter of a rich man called Narasinghlu Dora. She is arrogant, and is proud of her status. She does not like to live in a mud house. She also shows disrespect to her parents-in-law. Tima lives in his father-in-law's house and becomes a Sahukar (moneylender), and starts exploiting his own people. The dream of his community is shattered. The village is enlightened, modernized, and each one of the village has become a leader. There are 'ashrams' set up in the villages, and the lifestyle has changed. People apply intellect, cunning, and force in unhealthy competition and indulge in vulgar shows of wealth. These are signs of modernization. Tima becomes K. Timaya Dora (K.T. Dora). Tima loses his community and takes on a new form. He becomes an important representative of the tribals, in the view of the government. Many people come and meet him. All of them enjoy wine and women. Tima changes. As he forgets his people he in turn is also forgotten by them. He contests the election and goes for campaigning, but when he meets his people, they abuse him and tell him: "Eh, son of a bitch, where is your village?" He loses the election. His friends forget him. His father-in-law does not help

him. He undergoes a transformation. He recollects his past, becomes repentant for the follies he has committed. He recollects how the tribal people used to love and adore him. They had made him a symbol of their hopes. Now they do not like him. He realizes his folly and comes to lead his people and improve their lot. He calls upon them to resort to collective farming, to work together, to eat together and to live together. His words thrill the people of the tribal hamlet with the hope of a new life full of peace, harmony and opulence. We find an identical situation in Chinua Achebe's novel *A Man of the People* (1966) where Nanga forgets his own tribal community after being educated and assuming power. Here, Achebe critiques the educated youth who become rootless, forgetting their social responsibility. But the location of these two writers is different. Achebe is an insider wishing good for his own society, whereas when Mohanty does the same it is problematic, as he is an outsider to tribal culture, and in spite of his interiority of perspective, cannot possibly have total identification.

In all these novels on the tribal people, Mohanty presents Nature as an important part of tribal life and culture. Nature controls their life and living. The seasons with their vibrant opulence, the ancient, formidable mountains and the streams, the flowers and foliage, the cloud and storms, the birds and beasts, the totems and taboos—all these have their presence in the life of the tribal people. Nature gives them solace in times of misery and sorrow. In *Paraja* when Sukru Jani, Mandia and Tikra, the three bondsmen, return home for celebrating the 'chaitra' festival, Nature offers sympathetic services. The fresh breeze of dawn strokes their

unkempt hair. In *Amrutara Santana* Nature gives Puyu confidence when she loses the love of her husband. Nature inspires her to live and not to put an end to her life. The glorious sunrise reminds her that darkness will give place to light and hence tears may be substituted by laughter. Nature teaches her lessons on living happily. Nature also provides the right atmosphere for the lovers. The moonlit nights make Diudu passionate. In *The Ancestor* the forest fire frolicking on the hills and looking like curved lines of lightning fascinates the tribal people. Along with the description of nature, Mohanty celebrates the beauty of tribal men and women, their physique, and wild love. His love for the tribal people prompts him to urge that the tribals should not be exploited by the outsiders. For this reason he finds people other than tribals as exploiters and oppressors. He does not spare even their neighbours such as the Dombs. Mohanty, after demonstrating aspects of tribal life, expects that the tribal youth should take up leadership and lead their society.

Gopinath Mohanty's perspective on the tribals is very different from that of the Anglo-Indian and Indian English novelists. Unlike the Anglo-Indian writers, Mohanty does not denigrate the tribal society placing it at the lowest rung of civilization and modernity, nor does he view the tribals as obscure museum artefacts to be show-cased, appreciated and preserved. Further, he does not view them as primitives living in tranquility far away from civilization as they are represented by the Indian English novelists. Mohanty's concern for tribals and tribal society is one of recognition of their way of life, charm and problems. His novels show that 'outside' intervention is disruptive, affecting tribal harmony in adverse ways. This problem is

addressed emphatically by K. Shivarama Karanth in his novel in Kannada *Kudiyara Kusu* rendered as *Headman of the Little Hill.* We shall discuss it in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Tribal India in Indian Fiction in Translation-II

K. Shivarama Karanth: Advocating Preservation of Tribal Culture

The Kannada writer K. Shivarama Karanth was a contemporary of Gopinath Mohanty. Both of them wrote their masterpieces between the 1930s and the1970s. Like Mohanty, Karanth also trod different and innovative paths. Apart from being a good artist, Karanth also felt for the neglected sections of the society and like Mohanty, Karanth used literature as a medium to express his concern. In fact, he tried and excelled in a number of art forms that Mohanty did not attempt. As C.N. Ramachandran points out:

> Shivarama Karanth wrote about 45 novels, 97 plays, 9 encyclopaedias, 1 dictionary, 6 travelogues, 13 critical works on art, 8 works on science, 2 autobiographies, the second one in 3 volumes, 213 tales for children, four short-story collections, volumes of stray articles. In addition to such prodigious output, he was a painter, Yakshagana artist, and an Environmentalist. (1)

About his multifaceted personality K. Narasimhamurthy comments:

> Dr. Shivarama Karanth's mind has ten crazy faces, and he has trodden ten paths. Dance, social service, *Balavana*, primary education, *Yakshagana*, tourism, photography, painting, the encyclopaedia,

> science, environment, politics—Karanth has entered every sphere of man's life. And everywhere he has left the impress of 'Karanth.' (qtd. in Moily 200)

K.Shivarama Karanth was born in 1902 in Kota (South Kanara district). He joined the High School at Kundapur in his tenth year. But he could never put his heart and soul in academic studies. He was more interested in reading tales and books of general interest. Among his teachers, there was one Shivaramaiah who was very well read and who had a passion for literature. He instilled in Karanth a love of Kannada literature and motivated him to read the modern Kannada novels such as *Indirabai, Vagdevi* and *Maddidunno Maharaya*. During his high school days, Karanth read with great pleasure the translated novels of the Bengali writer, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Later, he joined the Government College at Mangalore. He stayed there with his elder brother, who had just begun his law-practice. Even in the college, he spent most of his time in the library rather than in the classroom. It was during this period that he read most of the works of Tagore and toyed, for sometime with the idea of joining Santiniketan. That was the time the Non-Cooperation Movement was sweeping across India, and every young man and woman was fired with the spirit of nationalism and revolt. Influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's call, he discontinued his college studies and joined the Independence struggle. Later, he was dissatisfied with the Gandhian

way of life. He tried his hand also in Kannada journalism. He and his friend Devanna Pai started a new monthly journal in Kannada called *Vasantha*. Strongly infused with the spirit of social reform, Karanth turned his attention to the theatre. The next and most important phase of Karanth's life was at Puttur, a town sixty kilometres away from Mangalore. Karanth arrived in Puttur in 1930 and stayed there for more than four decades. He wrote most of his novels and discursive works there. He also began social work, organized training camps for young people interested in social work. He went to villages, studied their conditions and attempted to educate villagers on various issues. During this period, he undertook an extensive survey of the economic and living conditions of Dalits in Puttur. This survey and the close contact with the Dalits paved the way for Karanth's first major and influential realistic novel *Chomana Dudi* (1933) (*Choma's Drum*) on the life of the downtrodden people. Karanth travelled far and wide both in India and abroad. His favourite places were libraries, sculpture museums, architecture and painting institutions. Despite frustrations and hardships, he made immense contributions to Kannada literature and culture. Though Karanth contributed immensely to all these fields, he is known as a novelist with more than ten novels to his credit. Many of them have been translated into English and other Indian languages and have been very popular among the readers.

The novel *Chomana Dudi* (1933), translated as *Choma's Drum*, is Karanth's major work. It is about a landless labourer's aspiration to have a piece of land—a possession that he is not able to acquire till his death. It reflects the exploitation of the landlord and the resultant inner revolution in Choma to liberate himself from mental and physical slavery. Choma, with a family of five children, has a pair of oxen which he had found abandoned as calves in a forest. He raises them, and his sole ambition in life is to own a piece of land and to cultivate it using his oxen. Hence, he doesn't want to sell them at any cost. But caste-prejudices being overriding, his dream of owning a piece of land remains a dream. In course of time, one of his sons dies due to the illness contracted in the coffee estates; another son gets drowned in a pond while the onlookers do nothing to save him since he is an 'untouchable'; and one other son gets converted to Christianity. Added to all these, one day he sees his unmarried daughter in the arms of the manager of the coffee-estate. Completely broken, Choma gets drunk, shuts himself up in his hut, and goes on playing wildly on his small drum till dawn. At dawn he passes away. The significant thing about the novel is Karanth's understanding of the problem. It is to be noted that Gopinath Mohanty also published a novel called *Harijana* in 1948 highlighting the problems of an untouchable family. Unlike *Choma's Drum* which is set in a village, Mohanty's novel is set in the city of Cuttack. But both are concerned with caste exploitation. Another novel *Marali Mannige* (1942) translated as *Return to the Soil* and also as *The Whispering Earth* depicts life in the coastal region. The story ranges through three generations and shows changes in the pattern of life. The

representative characters of the first generation are Rama Aithal, his two wives Parothi and Satthyabhama, and his sister Sarasothi. Their lives throughout are governed by age-old traditions, customs, and rituals. Rama Aithal's occupations are the ones that are handed down to him by tradition and he has no choice in them: agriculture and officiating in the religious ceremonies of others of his caste in the village. Since his first wife Parothi is childless, he marries another (Satyabhama) who gives birth to a boy and a girl. Rama Aithal's is a hard life: paddy cultivation depends upon the vagaries of nature; and people, owing to English education, have begun to lose their faith in customs and rituals. Tired of his hard and traditional life, Rama Aithal decides, for the first time in his family, to give his son modern English education. Lacch (Lakshman), the son of Rama Aithal, represents the second generation, the generation that falls an easy prey to the lure of modernity. In order to get modern education, he has to go from one city to a bigger city. Freed of all parental control and community-restraints, he begins to indulge in gambling and association with women of loose morals, squandering his father's hard-earned money. Even after marriage, he does not change his way of life; and after his father's death, he sells off all his property, leaving his mother, his wife and his only son as destitutes.

Rama, his son, represents the struggle, conflicts, and dilemmas of the third generation just prior to independence. Amidst untold hardships (since he and his mother are abandoned by his father) and in grinding poverty, Rama succeeds in getting a good education, culminating in a Bachelor's degree. But then, like many of

his generation, he suffers from unemployment, and moves from one small job to another. Also, since these are the days of the National Movement under the charismatic leadership of Gandhiji, he—like thousands of other young men—joins the Congress Party and participates in the movement. Finally, he makes a decision as different and as consequential as that of his grandfather—he decides to return to his village and take up agriculture as his profession.

The novel *Mookajjiya Kanasugalu* (1968) (*Mookajji's Vision*) brought Karanth the Jnanapith Award for 1977. Mookajji is an eighty-year old widow. She lives in a South Kanara village. She has an extraordinary gift: when she touches an object its entire history passes before her eyes. Through the vision of Mookajji, the history of mankind for over thousands of years is unfolded. Through this, we see the origin and growth of religious and social institutions. There are two narrators in this work; what the old woman tells her grandson is retold by him for his reader. This novel doesn't have either a hero or a heroine. In fact, even Mookajji is not the heroine of this work. She is just a link between the past and the present. Mookajji does not believe in the existence of an anthropomorphic God. She firmly maintains that God is Man's creation. According to her, beginning with the Vedic period, India has witnessed varied conflicts between races, religions, and cultures, and in consequence of these conflicts between races, religions, goddesses, rituals, customs, beliefs and faiths have been continuously changing. There is no single concept, or ideology or view that can be considered 'original' or 'pure.' The other important novels of

Karanth are *Sarasammana Samadhi* (1932), *Bettada Jeeva* (1943) and *Alida Mele* (1960). All these works give evidence of Karanth's concerns for social and cultural problems facing Indian society. The novel *Kudiayara Kusu* (*The Headman of the Little Hill*) also deals with such a social problem faced by the tribal people. It was written in 1949 and translated into English in 1951, but the English translation, titled *Headman of the Little Hill*, got published only in 1979. It has been filmed in Kannada as *Maleya Makkalu*.

In the Author's preface Karanth narrates how he decided to write the novel. He was concerned with the problem of outside culture interfering with the tribal way of life. He says: "what made me write my novel, were the social problems they faced and the outside interference which they could no longer withstand" (vi). It is to be noted that in the 1940s the question whether tribals should be isolated or integrated with the mainstream provoked a major debate among the intellectuals. The arguments between Verrier Elwin and A.V.Thakkar were part of this debate. This has been discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Karanth who had an interest in social problems was certainly aware of the debate and for his part, he was quite concerned about outside interference in tribal life and this is fully demonstrated in *Headman of the Little Hill*. The novel is set in the Western Ghats of South Kanara. There live a small tribal community called the *Kudibis* or *Kudias*. The noted anthropologist Christopher Von Furer Haimendorf, who studied various tribal groups in Andhra Pradesh, traces a number of common features between the Chinchu of Andhra Pradesh and the Kudias.

According to Haimendorf: "they have 'chenchu' like features. They were a self-contained group"(qtd. in Karanth v). Karanth also mentions in the preface:

> Though they served in cardamom estates in actual life they were free and independent. They could catch fish or trap and hunt wild life in ever so many ways. They were accustomed to hewing down and burning trees to clear land for the cultivation of paddy. As for food, they were self-supporting. From their landlords they wanted only cloth and salt. (v-vi)

As the novel unfolds we find that the headman has lost his son and daughter-in-law. He takes care of his grandson, Karia. He takes his grandson to the mountains to introduce the forest gods Malereya and Kalkuda. He tells him that their ancestors used to live there long ago. Karanth records this as follows:

> That was the place where his people had lived long years ago. That was where he, the Headman, had been born. He remembered those early days, more than sixty years ago, but somehow he could not recall why his elders had abandoned it and moved to the Little Hill. Something terrible must have happened. (2)

Later, Bhatta enters the forest with the intention of starting a cardamom plantation business. Bhatta is an outsider from the plain and is very clever. He is very courteous to the headman as he wants to carry out his plans for the plantation. However, the

headman dies after some months. According to the convention, Karia, the Headman's grandson, should have been declared the headman, but Bhatta wants Tukra, who is loyal to him, to be the headman. However, the Kudias resent this. Bhatta instigates conflicts among the tribals. Gradually he gains control and claims that he is the real master of the hill. He exploits women and blames the Kudias for theft. Karia with his friends Thima and Giddi goes away to the other hills. In his absence Tukra and Booda, two members from the tribal community, are declared as headmen of the big and small hills respectively. Karia catches an elephant and becomes famous. He also kills a tiger. Bhatta's son, who is the owner of the little Hills is impressed by Karia's bravery and asks him to be the headman. This is supported by the Kudias and the god Maleraya blesses him.

The tribal society as we see in the novel is self-supportive. The tribals do not depend upon others for anything except salt and clothes. Karanth says that the tribals have a barter system. They manage their livelihood by using the forest and by working for the landlord. They work for the Ballals, the landlords; they would give the Ballals cardamom and get a dhoti or a blanket or some salt in return. As Karanth points out:

> The Kudias had been tenants of the Ballals. It was an unspecified relationship: no law had laid down the duties of these men, who were not exactly slaves, or the responsibilities of the landlord. Once a year, when the present Headman's grandfather was a young

> man, all the Kudias went to the house of the Ballals with loads of wild cardamom and other forest produce and returned with a dhoti and a blanket each. The Ballals, kindly people, also gave the Kudias bags of salt to last them through the year. In that corner of the world, man needed only two things, which the forest did not provide: salt and cloth. (11)

But with the change of time, their life also changes. In the novel, Bhatta's entry has an adverse effect upon them. Bhatta is not a landlord, but an entrepreneur. Bhatta comes as an outsider to the hills. He is a Brahmin from the plains and has ulterior motives. He wishes to possess Kempi and other Kudia women. As Karanth writes: "Although he [Bhatta] spent full two hours going round the hamlet and the field on the pretext of inquiring about the welfare of his tenant, he was not rewarded with a glimpse of the woman whom he sought. For, unknown to him, Kempi had gone away to the Big Hill with her parents" (27).

His entry into the tribal society complicates life for the tribals. He is a cunning person and by feigning friendship with some of the Kudias he disturbs their social life. He does this by dividing them and by spreading misunderstanding among them, particularly between Tukra and Karia. The alien intrusion aggravates the conflict in the tribal community.

Karanth points out the change that takes place with the advent of Bhatta: "Within six months, Bhatta not only reigned but ruled over the place. He brought carpenters and masons from Vitla and had a house built for himself on the Hill with the help of the Kudias. Whenever Bhatta came there to pass a few days he brought his gun, the first that the Kudias had seen. He looked a prince when he arrived on the back of a brown horse with a retinue." Karanth sarcastically points out that Bhatta's coming "added new graces to the lives of the Kudias. From him they learned the use of kerosene and tobacco. He also taught them the systematic cultivation of cardamom by laying out an estate. He even let some of the young enthusiasts learn to use the gun. 'Throw your bows and arrows into the fire,' he often told them"(12). The activities of Bhatta resemble that of a colonizer who adopts different means to rule the indigenous people and introduces systems of behaviour which are alien to them.

There does exist competition and conflict among the tribals, but it is Bhatta who aggravates the conflict to achieve his own ends. He keeps Tukra on his side to acquire knowledge of the hills and to exercise his power over the people. As Karanth points out: "Among his favourites was Tukra. They exchanged many confidences. Despite the disparity in their station they went out together into the forest. Tukra had even seen the house of Bhatta's mistress. When Bhatta came to the hill, it was with Tukra's help that his bed was not lonely"(12). Thus, one sees that Bhatta behaves like the archetypal colonizer, first gaining knowledge to subsequently rule over the

indigenous people in the hills. Then he systematically selects one among them and then makes him a good colonized subject. Like a true colonizer, he uses the native resources and exploits the women of the hills. After Bhatta's arrival the social structure also changes. Karia is made the headman by the people in accordance with the wish of the late headman. Karia, though the headman, has to meet Bhatta and seek his blessings and also express his loyalty to him. This practice is carried out after Bhatta establishes his supremacy. Later, he decides who will be the headman of the hill. But it is not an easy task for Bhatta either. Some of the tribals resist him. Thimma warns him not to interfere in clan affairs. He said: "Marriage or funeral, punishment or expulsion, we have our own rules. In cardamom-picking and all such things we will obey whomever you appoint as foreman, even if it be Tukra. But as for other things, no. We have our Karia and we stand by him" (52). They make it clear that Bhatta might own the hill but the deity is above him. Bhatta does not stop there. He appoints Tukra headman of the hill though Karia is the legitimate heir. When the Kudias are not ready to accept Tukra, he shouts at them. He says that he is the master of the hill and if they don't obey they will go through hell. He rebukes them: "Scoundrels! Have you the audacity to tell me what I should do? I appoint Tukra to be your headman from this moment. If you listen to him, good; if not, you will repent. Know one thing, whoever wags his tail will get thrown out of the hill"(52).

Through the depiction of the outsider Bhatta as villain, Karanth demonstrates his own liking for the tribal people and their culture and shows his disapproval of the intervention of the outsiders. Karanth also describes the lecherous attitude of Bhatta towards the Kudia women. Bhatta wants to seduce Kempi, a tribal woman. He looks at her lustfully when she is bathing in the river. However, there is an element of romanticization in Karanth who, like Mohanty, romanticizes tribal beauty. About Kempi, Karanth says: "Kempi was the real beauty of the clan, and her eyes were like two lakes. Wherever she moved, with a sari draped tightly round her hips and the end of the upper part tied in a knot to the string of beads round her neck, she stirred up passions" (Karanth 10).

Like Mohanty, Karanth portrays tribal women as children of nature. He describes Kempi's bathing scene in the river in a sentimental way:

> It was pleasant to bathe in the forest streams, especially where over-hanging trees parted to let the sun shine through. The water itself was chill but the bather was warmed by the sun. Kempi loved to spend her days wallowing in water. She was more in her element there than in her own home. During such hours of delight she was like a daughter of light and water. She closed her eyes for long stretches of time, listening only to the swish of the stream as it brushed past her skin. Or she jumped from boulder to boulder or caught fish with her hands.

> Only when the shadows lengthened did her thoughts turn homewards. (65-66)

In Mohanty's *Paraja* too we find a similar kind of description where the tribal women are exoticized:

> The sisters Jili and Bili were bathing in the sheltered pool. Jili was seventeen and her sister only fourteen. They had the pool completely to themselves. Like all women of the Paraja tribe, they had cast off their clothes and were bathing naked. Jili had her face to the stream and was washing her sari, beating it on the sheet of rock in front of her. Bili squatted in knee-deep water, cleansing her hair with a shampoo of chilli seeds. At times she would dip her head and splash water on it with her hands. On the bank was an earthen pot which she had brought with her to fill. (Mohanty 8)

Karanth's description of tribal women resembles that of Mohanty's. Both associate tribal women with nature and speak of them as children of nature. Just as Karanth's Bhatta asks Kempi to come to the field and wait for him, and to this Kempi gives her consent, so also in Mahanty's *Paraja* Sukru Jani's daughter Bili falls prey to the evil designs of the contractor. This kind of depiction is hotly contested by Ivy Imogene Hansdak, a tribal woman scholar, who says that the relationship between man and woman is permissible within the community and it is not extended beyond

the tribes. Hansdak after studying the relationship between Jili and the road contractor in Mohanty's *Paraja* asserts: "[...] what is ignored [...] is the fact that the tribal girl's freedom is limited within her tribe. She cannot choose a non-tribal or 'diku' "(43). This is contrary to the popular notion that tribal women are free and outgoing. Karanth also seems to to have a similar notion about tribal woman being outgoing when the facts are otherwise.

When Bhatta's plot to seduce Kempi fails, he asks her to work at his house and then exploits her. Kempi thus degrades herself by submitting herself. But when Bhatta tries to seduce another woman, Giddi, she resists his attempt and Bhatta is beaten up by her husband Thimma. To cover up his guilt and to take revenge on this, Bhatta accuses Giddi's husband, Themma, of stealing his gold chain.

Bhatta, though an outsider, does not hesitate to intervene in the social life of the Kudias. When he tries to interfere in selecting a headman, Thimma explodes: "Master, if you are in the right, I don't mind your spitting in my face. But the moment you overstep the limits, I am not the man to obey. You must not interfere in clan affairs" (Karanth 52).

It is a well-known fact that Karanth usually does not favour supernatural elements. He even disapproves of religious leaders. He makes fun of them. About this aspect of Karanth's ideology C. N. Ramachandran says:

> We come across many 'sanyasis' or holy men in Karanth's novels: Krishnananda (*Sanyasiya Baduku*, 1948), Swamiji (*Sameekshe*, 1956), Bhagavanji (*Jagadoddhara-na*, 1960), Abhutanandas (*Aala-Nirala*, 1962), Ahinnannda (*Kevala Manushyaru*, 1971), and such. All these characters, without any exception, are portrayed as having run away from home to escape their responsibilities. Having no real wisdom or love of humanity, these holy men lead a life of ease and luxury, deceiving people with esoteric sermons and practices. (34-35)

It is surprising to note that Karanth who has been disapproving supernatural elements, invokes the tribal deity and favours the deity's command. This is done as the deity gives its verdict in favour of the tribals and is against the outsiders. The villagers have decided to have Karia, the grandson of the late headman of the hill to be the next headman. But Bhatta appoints Tukra as the headman. Beacause of this confusion, they go to the deity to seek his advice. Karanth describes the rituals performed by the villagers. The villagers go and offer Puja. After the ritual is over, they ask the man who was the vehicle of the spirit as to who is now headman of the little hill. As Karanth narrates:

> "We do your bidding," Chania submitted.
>
> "Do you say you have had nobody all these days?"
>
> Booda meekly said: "You had once made your wish known that the old Headman should be succeeded by his grandson.
>
> We have chosen accordingly. But because he has still

not come to age, we have asked Chania, the eldest among us, to do the work."

Tukra intervened: "What, Booda, why are you keeping back the full story?" He flashed eyes of hatred at Booda.

"I shall come to that ... We of the village have made these arrangements but our master has ordered that Tukra should be the headman."

"Master! Which master? Whose master?" Kalkuda bellowed.

Tukra explained: "The master of the garden, he who gives us salt and cloth. Do we not have to obey him?"

"Master, Master, Master!" Kalkuda repeated.

[....]

"These hills are mine. They have been mine since the beginning of time. If you do not want me, tell me, and I will go. And when I go I will rain a rain of blood. But if you choose to obey me you will live and prosper [....] Headman of the Little Hill, who is he? The dead man's grandson shall [he] be. He is not a child. None else may usurp his right."(58-59)

This is how Karanth indicates his own authorial opinion in favour of the Kudias and their tradition, over a newcomer who claims to be the ruler of the tribal people. Karanth who usually has an agnostic attitude towards supernatural power praises the deity in order to keep the tribal tradition intact. In order to reinforce the traditional

way of living he glorifies their bond with the local occupation and the local lords. He glorifies the forest gods and says:

> Kalkuda of the Little Hill was not like other deities. He was not placid like the Gods and demons down the valley. Delay of a day or two in celebrating their feasts would not annoy them and they were ready to forgive little lapses in the rules of worship. But Kalkuda was not a spineless deity. If he were, he would not have held sway over the ravines where men were afraid to step, would not have ruled over the distant hills and demanded tribute from the Kudia tribe. In the days before the Company Government, Kalkuda had even received a human head once in five years. (4)

The other person who comes to the hill is Valli Braganza, the Coffee Estate owner. Braganza comes to the hills for two months after the rains and again for the fair of the corner village. He is a Christian and wants to preach the message of his God to the Kudias. He raises a cross on the roof of his own hut on the Big Hill and whenever he finds time, he tells the Kudias of the greatness of his God. Braganza, being a Christian, does not have any belief in the tribal gods and rituals. He asks them to give up forest gods such as Kalkuda, Panguti and Kalkutiga and follow the cross. His plan is to build a church and appoint a priest. However, he finds himself lonely there. His constant companion on the Big Hill is Choma, without whom he does not venture out in the forests. Choma's daughter Giddi fills water in Braganza's pot. He

asks Choma to send his children Giddi and her brother to his own place. Though Choma and his wife don't like the idea, they cannot say no to the master. He promises that he will bring them back for the fair. Braganza comes for the fair, but does not bring Choma's children back. He says that Giddi is down with fever. Choma is not comfortable with such an explanation. He himself wants to go to Karkala to see his daughter. To his dismay he finds Giddi in the best of health, but with a strange garb, and her brother has cut his long hair, and evidently both have been converted into the religion of the padres. Choma's sorrow knows no bounds. He insists on taking them home with him but they refuse to come. He feels the sky has fallen on his head. His wife shares his pain. But they cannot tell their neighbours. Later, they do bring the two children and the villagers angrily set fire to Braganza's hut on the hill. Braganza has changed their names to Pauline and Paul respectively. When Braganza is separated from Pauline, he is furious. Giddi is carrying Valli's child in her womb. About Giddi too Karanth says that she has willingly consented to the relationship. As Karanth puts it: "The brief months of elation now appeared unreal and she even thought that Braganza had never existed, although deep inside her she pined for him" (95). Karanth, therefore, again misrepresents tribal mores, because tribal women, contrary to popular representation of them, are not free in the way Karanth makes them out to be.

Braganza is a typical character type in Karanth's novels. In *Choma's Drum* we find the same problem of religion highlighted by Karanth. In *Choma's Drum*

Choma's youger son Kuruva falls in love with Mari and this is seen as something inauspicious. His marriage is not attended by his father and sister or any family members as he is declared a "renegade" (Karanth, *Choma's* 83). In the same novel Michael is a Christian character portrayed by Karanth. He is the landlord's accountant. He seduces Bili just as we find Braganza the Christian planter seducing Giddi. Mari's family has been depicted as cunning and crafty. When Kuruva cultivates friendship with Mari, her parents are happy about it because "Mari's aged parents connived at their amorous affairs, thinking that their daughter's marriage would lift some burden off their shoulders" (*Choma's* 59). Karanth does not approve of the Christian proselytization among the tribals. As a well-wisher of the tribals he is for the protection of the indigenous culture of the tribals and wants it to flourish. However, it must be said that Karanth looks at Christians somewhat narrowly as people with the sole aim of converting others. He fails to see any other good works done by them and does not enquire if their activities are desired by the people concerned for their own good. After all, Karanth himself is an outsider just like the Christian Missionaries, and it seems improper for an outsider to decide what code the tribals should follow.

Bhatta and Braganza are stereotypical outsider characters. They are the embodiments of the colonizer. Their entry into the village results in complete cultural havoc in the community. Because of their entry two members of the village i.e., Thimma and Giddi, have to leave the village. They leave the village after Bhatta's

futile attempt to molest Giddi. Thimma knocks down Bhatta. Karia joins them later. Here the tribal has to go out because of the outsiders, and tribal society suffers from the resulting disequilibrium.

Karanth's technique of characterization is also in keeping with his romantic view of tribals and his outsider status. His characters are either perfectly good or perfectly bad, and are drawn with broad brush strokes. All outsiders—Bhatta, and Braganza—are bad characters and bring disharmony amongst the peaceful tribe. Tukra, right from the beginning, is the cunning villain, and Karia by contrast is shown as honest, brave and truthful, and the hero. He has all the good qualities of a headman. It is also interesting to note the reactions of the two women who are affected by the outsiders. While Kempi feels guilty and dies ultimately of her liaison with Bhatta, Giddi aborts her child by Braganza after being married to Thimma in order to show respect to the community and return to it.

Karanth in this way shows that the intrusion of a new culture into the traditional tribal society will cause disaster to the tribal culture. In the novel, the Kudias find the new culture alien and disturbing. It results in degradation of their traditional values. The deaths and other sad events that occur are the result of disrespect for the tribal values. Kalkuda, the forest deity, acts as conscience keeper. Whether the deity can speak or whether it exists at all is debatable, but it does figure as a character in the novel. The deity is the upholder of truth. It gives the tribe

direction. Whenever, the Kudias are in doubt they approach Kalkuda. Whether in deciding on the person who is to be the headman of the Hill or in determining whether Thimma and Giddi are guilty, Kalkuda gives the right judgement. For the Kudias, Kalkuda forms an integral part of their life. In important events like birth, marriage or death, they seek Kalkuda's blessings.

Karanth describes their rituals, celebration of festivals and other cultural events in positive terms. He lays emphasis on the sociological features. In the Kudia society there are very few women compared to men. Karanth makes it a point to dramatise this in the novel. Booda tells the headman that "Tukra should not have two women while there is a scarcity of girls in the Hill. Is it right he should have two wives?" (30). However there seems to be an excessive emphasis on their traditional customs, conventions and rituals, and this makes the novel an anthropological piece. One also notices Karanth's own ideology obtruding in the story. For instance, Giddi gets her child aborted to reinforce her fidelity to her innocent and faithful husband, and the community is definitely broadminded enough to accept her back from Christianity.

However, Karanth is not as meticulous in describing minute details of the tribals' life as Mohanty is in his novels. No doubt, Karanth has visited the tribals, but Mohanty's long association and research on tribal life and culture comes out prominently in his novel, and this solidity is something that Karanth's novel lacks.

However, both Mohanty and Karanth appreciate tribal culture and attempt to write about them: this is itself an act of courage in these times. Both celebrate tribal vigour and beauty. Mohanty narrates and appreciates the youthful and energetic body of Tikra in *Paraja*; Karanth does the same in his novel by depicting Karia as a courageous figure. Karia in the novel shows his bravery by catching an elephant and killing a tiger. Nevertheless, both the novelists point out the limitations of the tribals. There are characters who have a number of shortcomings. Being social reformers, the novelists express concern over the degradation of tribal culture on account of their contact with the outside world. The exploitation of the tribals by the outsiders disturbs these writers. Karanth's attitude towards the outsiders in the novel is that they are exploiters, cunning and greedy, and this self-seeking is evident in several instances. Both the novelists write for the sake of the preservation of tribal culture and heritage. Whereas these two writers emphasise the need for the preservation of tribal culture, Mahasweta Devi's concern by contrast has been to stress the need for the assertion of tribal rights. The next chapter shows how her writings attempt to present tribal reality and how tribal rights are asserted.

Chapter 7

Tribal India in Indian Fiction in Translation-III

Mahasweta Devi

Tribal India Cries for Attention

After Gopinath Mohanty, Mahasweta Devi is probably the most famous writer who has dedicated her entire life to the tribal cause. She has been working among the tribals and writing about them for more than three decades. Mahasweta Devi was born in Dhaka in 1926. Her father Ritwik Ghatak was a renowned writer in Bengali. Her mother Daritri Devi was also a writer and social worker. About her family she says:

> I was fortunate to be born in a family where both sides were liberal and women were held in great respect. The women were terrors, indomitable, fearless [...] And all received education. At home we were nine brothers and sisters [...] every day was a festival, so much sharing, I don't see that now. This had a great influence on my work, on my life. (qtd. in Sharma 161)

Mahasweta Devi has witnessed important phases of history such as World War II, the Quit India Movement of 1942, the Bengal famine of 1943, the Partition, and the Tebhaga Peasant Movement. Her involvement with social and political happenings started early. She tried a number of odd jobs, from peddling dyes to

teaching. She married Bijan Bhattacharya at the age of 21. Her son Navarun Bhattacharya is also a well-known writer. However, the marriage did not last long. Her subsequent marriage to Asit Gupta also broke up.

Mahasweta Devi started writing seriously in 1952-53. She contributed to *Suchitra Bharat* under the pen name Suchitra Devi. From the very beginning, Mahasweta Devi showed an inclination to break away from the conventional pattern of Bengali writing, both at the formal and thematic levels. Her novels reveal a strong sense of commitment to the exploited classes of society—the tribal peasants, the city proletariat, and women. It would not be an exaggeration to say that in our times, Mahasweta Devi is the only Bengali novelist in whose works, one of the main battles of Indian society i.e, feudalism vs. the peasant class, is reflected in its right perspective. Her first novel *Jhansir Rani* (1956) based on the life of the Queen of Jhansi is a famous work and has been translated into English recently. Mahasweta Devi has won several awards for her literary and social works. The most famous among them are the Sahitya Akademi, Jnanpith, Padmashree and Magasaysay Awards.

Mahasweta Devi has been involved deeply with the tribals and their life in the Chotanagpur region, and she has written a number of novels, short stories and articles concerning tribal issues. This chapter looks at a few of these works. Her writings on the tribals can be divided under two major themes: tribal history and the tribals' struggle for existence.

Let us first look at her works on tribal history. Mahasweta Devi's efforts have been to help the indigenous people in reviving their past and to give them a pride of place. Her narratives highlight the rich history and culture of the tribals of the Chotanagpur region which has been lesser known to the mainstream society in spite of the commitment and sacrifice of the tribals. For instance, the tribals had a number of resistance movements and revolts against the colonial masters and they laid down their lives for the country. However, these movements and their leaders have not been given adequate attention and are largely ignored by the mainstream historians and writers. In an interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Mahasweta Devi explains why she thought of writing about tribal history: "Once a tribal girl asked me 'When we go to school, we read about Mahatma Gandhi. Did we have no heroes? Did we always suffer like this?' That is why I started writing about the tribal movements and the tribal heroes" (Devi, *Imaginary* iii). Of course, the tribals have leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, but they are unsung and their contributions are not highlighted. Today, how much do we hear about the Revolt of the Paharia Sardars of 1764, the Tamar Revolts of 1789, the Munda Revolts of 1820, the Kol Insurrection of 1831-33, the Santal Insurrection of 1855, the Birsa Munda Movement of 1874-1901, or Tana Bhagat's Movement of 1914 and 1920? Or about tribal leaders such as Dulchand Tudu, Jayaram Murmu, Raghu Murmu, Ganpat Mahoto, Birsa Munda, Lakshman Naik?

Mahasweta Devi's efforts have been to bring forth the oral history of the tribals to the attention of mainstream society. Through her writings, she urges them to recognize the significance and greatness of tribal life and tribal history. Her novels *Sal Girar Dake*[1] (*In the Name of Birthday*), *Aranyer Adhikar* (*Rights over the Forests*), and *Chotti Munda ebang Tar Tir* (*Chotti Munda and His Arrow*) deal with tribal history. It is worth exploring how the writer combines oral tales, legends and myths with the documented facts in order to reconstruct the past. These three novels record the history of tribal life from the colonial period to contemporary times. The novel *Sal Girar Dake* or *In the Name of Birthday* was published In Bangla in 1984. The story is set in the Eighteenth century. Here, Mahasweta Devi depicts how the East India Company penetrates into the forest areas of Chotanagpur region in the 1750s. Sundra Murmu's father (a Santal) is the headman of the village. The Santal and the Paharia tribes live a harmonious life, supporting each other in times of difficulties. After the death of Sundra's father, Sundra takes over as the Majhi or head of the Santals. And after Sundra's death Tilka becomes the head. Tilka, as a child has heard inspiring stories from his grandmother. She would tell him about the British Raj and in a way prepare him to be a leader. Tilka is inspired by these stories. The Company spreads its business in this region. In this process, the Company introduces a monetary economy as against the traditional barter system of the tribals. In addition to this, the Company starts buying rice from the tribals at a cheaper rate to keep it in stock and to sell it back to the tribals when they are in want. The tribals spend the money in buying ribbons, clothes, bangles, garlands etc. The major blow to the tribals is that the Company opens railways and the postal system in the tribal areas,

destroying the forest. The Paharias and the Santals are united in their struggle against the British. Tilka Majhi takes the lead in the struggle. They refuse to pay taxes. They win the battle against the Company by defeating Captain Brook's forces in 1772. This victory is very inspiring and they continue to fight. Realizing the strength and unity of the tribals, the Company adopts foul means. It tries to divide the two communities of tribals by patronizing one of them. Under the leadership of Cliveland, the Company attempts to deceive the Paharias by becoming their benefactors. The Paharias are recruited into the Company's workforce. However, the Paharias also realize their folly, and get united again to fight the British. The British have superior weapons. They win the battle, but with a lot of difficulty. Mr. Brooke, Philips and Cliveland are killed. Among the tribals, Tilka Majhi and Mansa are killed. However, these deaths bring unity and determination among the tribals.

The novel *Aranyer Adhikar* (1977) is based on Birsa Munda's Movement for tribal emancipation. There are different views about the Movement. According to K. S. Singh, contemporary records and the British newspapers considered this to be an agrarian movement. Indian newspapers also seemed to take the same view. Some of these considered it to be the continuation of the Sardars' Movement. According to these sources, Birsa was the tool of the Sardars. They also underlined the anti-Christian and anti-European character of Birsa's movement. The animosity towards the 'dikus,' or the aliens was represented as the motive force behind the movement. The indigenous accounts however, represent him as primarily a religious leader, an incarnation of God, a social reformer, counselling moderation and calling upon his

people to avoid extremist means of struggle. These interpretations view Birsa's movement as an agrarian, political, continuation of the old Sardars' Movement, and as being anti-Christian and anti- European. It is worth exploring Mahasweta Devi's view on the movement by studying the representation of the movement in the novel. Singh further points out that until the post-Independence period, Birsa and his movement were a much-ignored chapter of Indian history. Though Birsa's movement had a much greater significance, it received much less attention than the Santhal Insurrection of 1855-57. Birsa's movement was a leap forward in the history of tribal movements in India. He directed his crusade simultanously against two systems—feudal and colonial. Singh points out that until the movement of 1874-1901, the tribals considered the 'dikus,' (the native Zamindars, small kings and petty police officials) their enemies. It was Birsa who exposed the British government as the main enemy of the Munda people and emerged as the hero of his tribe. K.S. Singh rightly points out: "He spoke of a new millennium for his distressed people, of freedom and salvation, status and power, opportunity and fulfilment in the new world in place of the old one which lay shattered within a few decades of colonialism" (*Birsa Munda* 1). Mahasweta Devi's choice of the particular historical event, which is a neglected phase of Indian history, gives evidence of her social commitment. Through this novel, Mahasweta Devi exposes the exploitation of the tribals and its effects on their lives—physical as well as emotional. She makes an attempt to give a realistic picture of the movement. She exposes the crookedness, exploitativeness, and callousness of the British government authorities, and the ruthless and wily nature of non-aboriginal landlords, moneylenders and petty officials. The writer picks up the

essential historical factors that were at work in this particular period in the history of the Munda tribe. Unlike writers who were stimulated by tribal exotica and chose to romanticize and idealize tribal societies, Mahasweta Devi does not present a romanticized picture of the Munda tribe. Instead, she portrays the poverty-striken and insecure lives of the tribal people for whom rice remained an eternal dream, where life meant wandering from one village to another due to ceaseless eviction by the 'dikus,' for whom land reclaimed from the forest was the basis of tribal life. As we can note in the novel, Birsa's father Suguna's idea of happiness lies in getting two meals of boiled china-seeds, wearing an un-torn dhoti above the knees and sleeping under the intact roof of a leafy hut. In this poverty-stricken world, even the attainment of bare necessities fills life with a regal grandeur. Mahasweta Devi portrays Suguna's world as follows:

> This world of his had rigid borders. In that world one could become a king, if one got two meals of *ghato* a day, four handloom dhotis in a year, the warmth of husk bags in the winter, escape from the clutches of the money-lender, 'mohua' oil for lighting the lamp, black salt for 'ghato,' forest roots and honey and meat of wild rabbits and birds. (*Aranyer* 51; translation mine) [2]

The novelist uses an ancient Munda as the narrator, and he tells the history of his tribe to the younger generation. She describes the system of exploitation in the direct and accurate language of one who has survived all this exploitation. In prison, Dhani tells the young Mundas:

> Look, the first forefathers of Birsa's clan had founded Chotanagpur. But someone else became the king and since then outsiders came to our land and forests and snatched away everything [...] Ha! Look! The diku wants a horse, the Munda will pay for it. The diku's wants will be supplied by a Munda. (21)

Mahasweta Devi shows her grasp of history in the foregoing extract. Her ability to detect the numerous historical forces that ate into the life of the tribal peasants is evident in the novel. She also shows evidence of knowing the people and the times by her depiction of the way people like Dhani Munda lived—the manner in which their lives had been intruded upon by the money-lenders, the zamindars, the missionaries, the jails, the courts, the tarred roads, the trains, bayonets, guns, the droughts, the famines, the recruiting agents, and free labour. Along with this, the natural calamities—drought and famine—combined with the feudal trick of hoarding of food grains is well captured by Mahasweta Devi. During the famine, the recruiting agents lure the tribals to the distant tea gardens and take advantage of the famine. It is as if these agents look forward to drought and famine for doing business as suggested by P. Sainath in his book *Every One is Happy with a Good Drought* (1996).

Mahasweta Devi gives a picture of contemporary social life of the tribals and captures their condition, and prepares them for a rebellion. She brings out the contradiction between the religion of Singbonga (the Munda God) and the mission-sahibs, between the age-old Mundari prohibitions inscribed in Munda's blood and the

education he received from the Christian missions and Anand Pande, the Vaishnava teacher. She indicates changes that have been taking place in Mundari society through an analysis of Birsa's thoughts:

> [...] something was pulling Birsa away from the Mundari world, out of his familiar life towards the lure of the world outside. It was a terrible attraction, strong and irrepressible.
>
> [....]
>
> Mundari life meant a life full of thousands of edicts. Superstitions flowed through every blood vessel of a Munda's body: today's Mundari would be tomorrow's Christian, again a Mundari and Christian again. But whatever your names were, whether you were Suguna, Komta, Donka, Bharami, or Dhani today, and Poulush, Daud, Mothy, Yohan, or Abraham tomorrow, in your blood the Lord Singbonga will always hold sway. Haram Asul's frown will always be upon you ... Birsa knew that it was a great sin even to think of a life different from the Mundari life lived by lakhs of Mundas. But Birsa had committed that great sin. Somewhere in his blood protest and indignation had gathered day by day [...] . (40-41)

The following passage depicts Birsa who has lost faith in his old religion:

> Birsa felt that strange, unseen powers were gradually overpowering him. He was not able to come back to his old faith. But why couldn't Birsa become a Christian once and then go to Anand Pande? Why

> would it seem to Birsa that his old religion could no more hold and shelter him? (71).

The novel describes Birsa as being a descendent of the two brothers who founded Chotanagpur, playing the flute, dancing in the tribal dormitory, and who felt that the lives of Munda people were like torn wrappers. He felt very sad when at the end of the day he did not get a bit of salt with his 'ghato' (a type of wild rice). His only ambition was to make his mother a queen by bringing all the sacks of salt and all the jars of 'mohua' oil from the weekly market and laying these at her feet. He is nostalgic about the golden tribal past, bound to the forest with a strong emotional tie. When he is inside the forest, he gazes at the blue mountains that merged with the horizon and gets lost in reveries. At such moments, he saw those primordial men in his dream. He would see those two brothers crossing the flooded river. He would hear them proclaiming: All these are ours!" (29). As a child Birsa hears from Dhani about their heroic struggles. Birsa listens to their stories and is determined to free his motherland. Even as a child he is determined to learn so as to equip himself for future struggles: he fights for his father's lost rights in the Khuntkatti village and recovers them.

Birsa studies in mission schools with the goal of winning back his father's Khuntkatti land. He is attracted towards the prayer meetings, and sings the beautiful hymns, but a severe confrontation with Father Nottrott and the abuse the missionaries shower on the Sardars creates disillusionment. He has great respect for the Sardars. He realizes that "sahib sahib ek topi hai"—all whites, missionaries and the

government wear the same cap (63). He leaves the mission, renounces the Christian religion, stays with a Vaishnava teacher and studies the Indian epics and mythological texts in search of the origins of his tribe. But Birsa feels restless. He always feels that he has come into this world with a mission.

When Birsa lifts a corpse from the village burial ground and takes the coins and the silver ring that are buried along with the corpse in order to buy rice for his starving parents, his mother is horrified. At this stage of the novel, we see Birsa's emergence as the "Dharti-aba," the father of the Earth. He is no more his mother's son whose ambitions and promise are limited to sacks of salt and jars of oil, but a symbol of a larger goal. He announces: "Don't call me Birsa, mother. I am Bhagwan. I shall not let the Munda forget their deprivations; I shall not cradle them in my arms. I shall win back for all—all these forests, hills and land... Mother! These people wanted a Bhagwan. So I have come back as the Bhagwan" (72).

Through this spelling out of her hero's goals—recovery of the forests, hills and land—Mahasweta Devi establishes the fact that the basic nature of Birsa's movement was agrarian. Having given a picture of his formative years, she prepares him as a religious 'guru.' She describes how Birsa teaches his fellowmen how to prevent epidemics. He cures the Mundas of ignorance and superstitions, and restores the lost confidence of the Munda race. Then he realizes that it is not enough to teach people how to prevent epidemics, but that he has to restore the motherland which is weeping. Throughout the novel, Mahasweta Devi uses the mother-son metaphor.

Deep inside his heart he could hear Mother Forest weeping: "I want to be pure, I want to be clean" (72). Throughout the novel Mahasweta Devi uses the image of a weeping, ravaged, dry-breasted, stripped-off Munda mother and a Munda son, consoling and assuring his mother in order to stress the great emotional ties Birsa has with the forest. And through the reiteration of this metaphor she accentuates this gradual shaping of Birsa's goal of establishing a pristine, sacred Munda raj unadulterated by 'dikus.'

Contemporary records and newspapers as mentioned earlier, believe that Birsa's revolution was a continuation of the Sardar movement. But Mahasweta Devi refutes this and does not allow Birsa to be a puppet of the Sardars, who had finally succumbed to the British. In the novel Birsa contemplates the Sardars' role in his movement: "The Sardars' movement meant a movement of petitions [. . .]. Though the Sardars continued their movement for the welfare of the Munda people, it seemed that their movement was only directed towards this end—to make the Chotanagpur Tenure Act effective" (*Aranyer* 86-87).

Birsa's movement is different because unlike the Sardars, he is not ready to be a puppet. He wants to win the battle and establish the Munda raj by driving out the aliens. Thus Mahasweta Devi hints at the political goal and the agrarian nature of the Birsa movement. Birsa thinks independently and chalks out plans and strategies. He combines the agrarian, religious and political issues. Mahasweta Devi shows that Birsa's movement was independent and that all these aspects are inseparable. She

also separates this Munda struggle from the national struggle. As pointed out by Shyamali Kurian, Mahasweta Devi makes it clear that "the Mundas were not fighting for the nation, but for the recovery of their land, their 'disum'" (154). About Birsa's vision Mahasweta Devi says that Birsa knew that he had taken a hard vow. He wanted to free the Mundas from their old inert life style. He wished to form a social structure where the society made by the British and their administration would get obliterated. He wants to eradicate all customs and rituals that were introduced into their lives by the aliens. He wants to reform society—he prohibits Koram Puja and the other customs, the witchcraft, and the blood-spilling rituals. He would work for the starved Mundas.

For *Aranyer Adhikar*, Mahasweta Devi travelled through the Mundari villages acquainting herself with the people whose history she undertook to depict in the novel. The speeches of the Munda people in her novel throb with life. The Bengali dialect which she uses to translate the rich and poignant experiences of the imaginative, simple minded, mystic and oppressed Munda tribe brims over with the sap and savour of real life. To echo Birsa, the Mundas are illiterate; they do not have a script; they do not record their experiences in written words. They 'sing' instead. All the deprivations and humiliations of their lives are recorded in their songs.

Mahasweta Devi has captured this lyrical element in her reproduction of the language of the tribe. In *Aranyer Adhikar* she excels in deploying idioms, styles, and modes from the Mundari language and captures the nuances and idiosyncrasies of the tribal's world-view. But the task of using language in a novel like *Aranyer Adhikar*

was not limited only to understanding the language of the Munda tribe and rendering a Bengali translation of it. The novel, which is set against the backdrop of a complex social-political situation, portrays a society of heterogeneous people. We find here the non-aboriginal moneylender and zamindar, the petty Bihari police official, the educated elite Bengali, the hypocritical English missionary, the barrister, the journalist, the callous bureaucrat, the British army officer, and the ruthless British administrator.

So Mahasweta Devi had a harder task at hand. She had to take great care to include all the vivid patterns of this complex historical situation in her use of language, and she has done it very well. She does this by drawing on several sources—the 'impure' idiom of everyday speech to represent the non-aboriginal feudal lords and the petty police officials, the standard variety to represent the educated Bengali, and several registers of the Bengali language like the medical, the ecclesiastical, the bureaucratic, the journalese, the legalese and the telegraphic to delineate the colonial forces. She depicts these representatives of different social classes and various walks of life through the typical languages they speak and write. Her command of these various linguistic expressions gives the novel a rare social dimension of totality.

The novel as a form is unparalleled in documenting human lives. Tribal societies, however, as classified and documented by writers, can be represented more vividly in fiction and hence, they become more accessible through novels like

Aranyer Adhikar. In this regard *Aranyer Adhikar* and her other works have played a major role in documenting authentic aboriginal lives.

Mahasweta Devi's *Chotti Munda ebang Tar Tir* (1980) or (*Chotti Munda and His Arrow*) follows events after Birsa's revolution. It is about another tribal revolutionary called Chotti Munda who leads the revolution against the moneylenders and contractors who exploit the tribals even after Independence and in spite of the existence of laws meant to safeguard the interests of the tribals. Chotti Munda draws inspiration from Dhani Munda, an associate of Birsa Bhagwan who is also a skilled archer. The police are still in search of Dhani. Chotti Munda organizes the tribals to emancipate them from the clutches of the moneylenders, landlords and contractors who form a nexus with the police and politicians. Chotti Munda does not support violence, but he saves the Daroga (bodyguard) of his arch-rival Teerathnath. He also doesn't approve of the Naxal ways. But when innocent tribals are killed, he has no other way except to use his mythical bow and arrow. Chotti passes the arrow to Haramu, his son, and the latter lifts it. Then, Chotti offers himself to the police to be arrested. The Sub-Divisional Officer gets up and moves. But at that moment thousands of tribal hands with bows raised to the skies, shout "No." The non-tribals also raise their hands in protest.

These three novels of Mahasweta Devi record the tribal past starting from the eighteenth century to the present times. In her novels she narrates how the colonizers come and intrude into the forest and introduce an alien economic and

political system there. Mahasweta Devi reminds the reader of important events of Indian history such as the Battle of Plassey of 1757, which the tribals thought was between two kings—the Sahibs and the nawabs. She also mentions the 1930s, the heyday of the Indian Struggle of Freedom. Scholars like K. S. Singh and A. R. N Srivatsava record the tribal movements such as the Paharia Sardar Movements, Birsa Munda Movement, Tilka Majhi Movement, and Mahasweta Devi has used these historical sources in writing these novels. For instance as mentioned earlier, she used the noted anthropologist, K.S. Singh's book *Dust, Storm and Hanging Mist* which is about Birsa Munda's struggle, as one of the sources for the novel *Aranyer Adhikar*. K.S. Singh had used the writings of missionaries, government records, and newspaper reports in writing this book. Interestingly, K. S. Singh was inspired by Mahasweta Devi's novel and revised his own book and renamed it with the concrete title *Birsa Munda and His Movement (1874-1901)*.

What makes these novels different from other fiction about peasants and subalterns is the author's treatment of tribal myth. We find in *Aranyer Adhikar* that Birsa has become a mythical figure among the tribals. He is given a religious dimension and his movement is also similarly extended to make it more powerful. Chotti Munda's arrow also has a mythical quality and it is very popular among the tribals. One notes the use of myth in *Bashai Tudu*, another novel by Mahasweta Devi on the theme of Tribal Movement. In this novel Bashai Tudu develops a new strategy of warfare and resistance rooted in his own cultural ethos, which is not known to the 'dikus.' For others, Bashai dies and appears before them five times. Similarly, Chotti

Munda, Bashai Tudu, and Birsa become mythical figures. They adopt strategies rooted in their cultural ethos and myth, which have become a secret knowledge shared only by the tribals. This feature distinguishes the tribal movements from the peasant movements or the Naxal movements. In Ngugi Wa Thiongo's novel *Matigari* (1987), a fictional character called Matigari becomes a mythical character and the Kenyan intelligence agents talk about him until they discover that Matigari is a fictional character. In the case of *Matigari* an oral myth is evolved from a written text, whereas in the case of *Bashai Tudu*, a written text is evolved from an oral myth. Apart from these documented facts Mahasweta Devi uses local folk tales. For instance, Tilka's grandmother is a great source of tribal history. She tells him how the Sahibs came to the forest. The stories about the missionaries who worked among the tribals are still alive among the tribals. Even now one can hear the tribals narrating stories about Fr. Levens, Chilmili Sahib and others who worked among the tribals. The oral stories also talk about the history of displacement which is part and parcel of tribal life. As we can see in *Chotti Munda ebang Tar Tir*, Choti's father is displaced again and again as the places he wants to settle down in are occupied and factories and mines have come up on them.

The novels highlight tribal struggles. For example, in *Bashai Tudu* Bashai's aim is to lead a struggle where the tribalscan have a major say. They are leaders and not followers of the mainstream. This is evident from the conversation between Bashai and Kali Santara:

> 'Does it have to be one of those ways that you have known and followed? Either the CPM, or the CPI, or the Naxalite? Why not the Bashai Tudu way?'
>
> 'What's that way?'
>
> 'The way that works. Where the law serves, we'd go for the law. Where the jotedar defies the law, we'd step beyond the law. If the Naxals stand by me, I'll accept their support. If you come with me, I'd welcome you.' (Devi, *Bashai* 46)

Mahasweta Devi seems to imply here that by calling Bashai Tudu a Naxalite, history was being written again by the dominant groups—the communists, the administration and the urban groups. Here she tries to emphasize the self-determination and self-assertion of the tribals. Unlike historical novelists who fictionalise history by romantic descriptions of historical figures, Mahasweta Devi problematizes history in her writings for the reader so that the reader is deterred consciously from arriving at a stereotypical and definitive response. Her engagement with the tribals and her research on history and her documentary style give these novels a realistic touch.

Mahasweta Devi's descriptions of places like Singhbum, Palamu, Chakradharpur, Chaibasa, the Koel river and a number of villages situate her fiction in a locale that is authentic in terms of history and geography. Her use of tribal terms such as 'ulgulan,' 'diku,' 'ghato,' 'haramdeo' and many others add to localization.

She also assimilates in her diction a number of English words. One noted example is that her tribal characters pronounce the word 'jail' as 'jehel,' and government as 'gormen'. Her use of polyglot diction, 'chalit' Bengali, proverbs and idioms is also an additional effort to achieve an authentic specificity. The songs and dances of the tribals which form an integral part of their struggle find their due place in these novels. Thus, these narratives together record the tribal past and add to their documented history: they narrate their glory and also tell us what happened to them and what they had lost.

Another concern in Mahasweta Devi's fiction is the theme of exploitation and the tribal struggle for existence. Her short stories deal with sexual exploitation, the problem of bonded labour, displacement, and other socio-economic problems faced by the tribals in the contemporary world. Her short stories "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha," "Douloti, the Bountiful," "The Hunt," and "Draupadi" all deal with the stark reality of tribal life. The narrative "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha" is a story about the mainstream attitude to tribal society and the mainstream's refusal to understand it. Puran Sahay is a journalist from Bihar who comes to Pirtha, a famine affected region in Madhya Pradesh. His one-time friend, Harisharan has been appointed a Block Development Officer (BDO) there. Puran has read a lot about the tribals from the writings of Verrier Elwin and S. C. Roy. He wants to write about the famine. He meets Harisharan and through him the Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO). The SDO in typical official style, suggests that he should accompany him to visit the important tourist spots and tribal communities:

> —You've come to Madhya Bharat [lit. Middle India], why don't you see Gwalior, Indore, Jabbalpur, Dhara-Mandu, Bhopal? Do you know that there's still a festival at Shivapuri, a statue-festival? The descendants of the servants of the old kings serve and worship the kings' statues! 'The Middle Ages in Middle India' will be a fine piece. Go to Bastar, see the tribals. (Devi, "Pterodactyl" 101)

For the BDO, tribals are showpieces to be gazed at. This reminds one of the tourist guides in India urging tourists to visit tribal habitats. For a journalist, tribals are topics for sensational coverage. The villagers from Madhopur have come to the SDO's office. One of them called Shankar is a literate person. They sit in the SDO's room and discuss different problems. Puran goes to a village in a truck. During his journey, the truck driver talks to him. According to the driver, the government is obsessed with tribal welfare, whereas the tribals misuse the facilities:

> What's the use giving rice to the tribals? When have they eaten rice? Such good quality molasses, popcorn! The government lives for the Adivasis.
>
> [....]
>
> —Be it jobs, or other kinds of aid, everywhere it's tribals and untouchables! [...] No one can fulfil their needs, sir. They sell everything they get, they have standing clients in Rajaura you know. They won't live in government housing, so why should the government build for them? (Devi, "Pterodactyl" 108).

This is the typical attitude of an outsider, who belongs to the so-called mainstream, towards the tribals and the welfare measures meant for them. The tribal habitats are so inaccessible that nobody visits them. As the writer comments, even Nehru and Indira Gandhi tried, but gave up reaching out to these areas. Mahasweta Devi gives a vivid picture of this region. Through the travels of the journalist and his assistants, she depicts the reality of this region:

> They come to Rajaura.
>
> A very small place. The *Block* Development *Office*. Police Station, *school*, Health centre (closed).
>
> There are almost no brick buildings besides the Bank and the Post Office. There is a market and shops, and a sawmill. Two video halls, and a signboard declaring this is an 'Animal Clinic', but behind it a roofless room, whose doors and windows have either disappeared, or were never there. (110)

Shankar accompanies Puran. Later, they meet Bhan Singh Shah. He is a descendant of the Gond king. Shankar Singh Shah was killed by the British in the Mutiny. Though he is a tribal, he does not associate himself with the tribals as he is a leader from the feudal backgound. He is an example of tribals who are better off and who therefore stopped bothering about their community. Shankar narrates an account of the glorious days the tribals had before the intrusion of the outsiders and shows how misfortune struck the tribals. Shankar explains that the tribals had a self-

sustaining life in the past. Nature provided for their needs and the tribals lived in harmony with nature. However, with the advent of the outsiders, misery and suffering came to the tribal society. As Mahasweta Devi writes:

> —Once there was forest, hill, river, and us. We had villages, homes, land, ourselves. In our fields we grew rice, kodo, kutki, soma, we lived. Then there was game to hunt. It rained, peacock danced, we lived. People grew, the community grew, some of us moved to a distance. We asked the earth's permission, we are setting down stakes to build a roof, settling land to grow crops. The Chief of our society told us where we should settle land fit for living. There we built homes, made villages, settled land each for himself. We worshipped the tree that was the spirit of our village. Then we lived, only us.
>
> [....]
>
> —Why did the foreigners [outsiders] come? We were kings. Became subjects. Were subjects, became slaves. Owed nothing, they made us debtors. Alas they enslaved and bound us. They named us, as bondslaves, Haroahi, Mahidar, they named us Hali, named us kamiya, in many tongues. Our land vanished like dust before a storm, our fields, our homes, all disappeared. The ones who came were not human beings. Oh, we climb hills and build homes, the road comes chasing us. The forest disappears, they make the four corners unclean. Oh, we had our ancestors' graves! They were ground underfoot to

> build roads, houses, schools, hospitals. We wanted none of this, and anyway they didn't do it for us.
>
> —Alas! In pain we are stone, mute. We failed to give peace to the ancestors. We are coming to an end, rubbed off the soil. (119-120)

Shankar's statement sums up the plight of the tribals and presents a sharp contrast to their glorious past when they lived in harmony with nature keeping their culture intact. However, with the intrusion of outsiders, their life got disintegrated, and they faced adversity and misery. It also tells us that in the name of development, tribals are displaced, their land is looted, and their livelihood is disturbed. The roads, hospitals and other modern amenities are meant for the outsiders. The tribals either don't make use of them, or are not allowed to make use of them. This is not to say that Mahasweta Devi is advocating a strategy of taking them back to their past or asking them to keep their separate identity alive. In an interview with Gayatri Spivak she denies this aggressively: "No, no, no. [....] They are Indians who belong to the rest of India. Mainstream India had better recognize that. Pay them the honour that they deserve. Pay them the respect that they deserve" (Devi, *Imaginary* x). While Shankar is attributing the disaster of the intrusion by the outsiders, the imbalance in ecology and the destruction of nature to their failure in satisfying their ancestors, a group of people surround the strange creature called pterodactyl that Bikhia has painted on the base of a wall.

The Pterodactyl comes as a symbol of their ancestral soul grieving because their ancestors' burial ground has been desecrated in the now extinct settlement.

About Pterodactyl Mahasweta Devi says: "Pterodactyl—a flying reptile of the pterosauria class from the mesozoic era, extinct species. Their limbs and organs were suitable for flying,—their bones hollow and air-filled [....] One group of these creatures, the pterosaurus, had batlike leathery wings"(154-55). Some tribal communities consider bats to be their ancestors. This reminds one of a story called "The Rightful Inheritors of the Earth" written by Vaikom Mohammed Basheer in Malayalam. Here the narrator's wife and nephew want to kill the birds including the bats as they eat up the grains. When the tribals see them attempting to kill the bats, they attack the two people with their lethal weapons, because bats symbolize their ancestors' soul. The two people run for their lives to escape from the tribals.

Mahasweta Devi wants to say that the mainstream has destroyed the whole civilization and hence it is not possible to comprehend it. She points out: "Too little can be known, we have destroyed a continent that we kept unknown and undiscovered. The tribal wants human recognition, respect, because he or she is the child of an ancient civilization" (177-178). She further says that there is no communication-point between us and the pterodactyls and that we belong to two different worlds:

> —To build it [the communication point] you must love beyond reason for a long time. For a few thousand years we haven't loved them, respected them. Where is the time now, at the last gasp of the century? Parallel ways, their world and our world are different, we

> have never had a real exchange with them, it could have enriched us. ("Pterodactyl" 197)

As a result of the destruction of nature and the ecological balance, and the intrusion of outsiders, the tribal areas face serious problems: famine, poverty, illiteracy and all other disasters—all can be attributed to the ill-treatment of the tribal civilization. Mahasweta Devi presents the stark reality of this region through Puran's survey. This region is inaccessible. There are no facilities for health, or education. The officials are corrupt. Mahasweta Devi rightly points out: "The Central and State Governments have kept at least thirty-five projects and subprojects in the ITDP sector in various names, and for each there is an enormous amount of money. [...] There are projects, money is being spent, yet there is no reflection in actual fact" ("Pterodactyl" 188-89). She writes that according to the rule (Integrated Tribal Development Programme) tribal land can't be bought by a non-tribal. But it is getting sold. They (the tribals) are forced to sell it. The awful truth is that the government officers, contractors, and businessmen are eating that money. Mahasweta Devi comments:

> The 'Act Prohibiting the Transfer of Tribal Land' is a total failure. For shrewd exploiters have either bought land in the name of non-existent tribals or forced the landowner to sell. Or the landowner knew nothing at all. This is happening with the co-operation of the Revenue Department and the courts of law. ("Pterodactyl" 188)

There is persistent famine in the region because of the contractors and moneylenders. Education is a distant dream. People are affected by serious diseases. Many of them have contracted tuberculosis. In the story, the Sarpanch helps the old woman, and feeds her. As Mahasweta Devi records: "A strange mixed smell attacks him: of dying of starvation bit by bit, of an unwashed body, of a rotting mouth."(131). The people, Nagesia for instance, have no date-leaf mats, not even grass mats in the winter. They have been taken away by the employers. They have nothing to wear, except the loincloth. Thus, through this story, Mahasweta Devi invites our attention to the tribal land, which she regards as the first nation, the *Adim Jati*. If these stories are looked at in the context of the 21st century, there is a major aggressive attempt by the developed countries to exploit the ecology of the developing countries—the "grabbing and deforestation," as Spivak calls it, practised by the dominant countries (Devi 200). According to Mahasweta Devi this story deals with "ecological loss, the loss of the forest as a foundation of life, but also the complicity, however apparently remote, of the power lines of local developers with the forces of global capital"(201).

Mahasweta Devi's short stories— "Douloti, the Bountiful," "The Hunt," and "Draupadi"—centre around the theme of sexual exploitaion, mostly of tribal women. The other stories, namely, "Arjun," "Salt," and "Shishu," deal with economic exploitation of the tribals and their struggle. In "Douloti the Bountiful" Mahasweta Devi highlights the problems of women as bonded labourers. In this story, Crook Nagesia's fourteen-year-old daughter Douloti is taken away to the city by Paramananda Mishra the middleman on the pretext of marriage. Douloti thinks that

he will marry her, but she realizes later that she has been sold as a bonded labourer. She is kept in a whorehouse managed by a woman called Rampiyari, and is raped by Latia, the contractor. She becomes his mistress. She has no freedom. She belongs to the contractor. Latia says, "Tell Rampiyari, this girl is mine, when I let her go, she can take clients" ("Douloti" 59). She is made pregnant again and again, and leads a miserable life. The last scene.ends where Douloti collapses on 15th August at the flag post signifying her bondage even after several decades of Independence. It has to be noted that Douloti is not a tribal girl, but a Dalit's daughter[3]. Unlike Mohanty, who privileges one community over another, Mahasweta Devi's concern is for all communities that go through hardship. She wants change in the living conditions of all oppressed people.

In the short story "The Hunt" the main character is Mary Oraon. She is born to a tribal mother and an Australian white father, who had a tea estate. Later he leaves for Australia. Mary works at Prasadji's bungalow. She has chosen to marry a Muslim man called Jalim. She invites the wrath of Tehsildar Singh, the contractor who comes to Prasadji's bungalow to fell trees. Tehsildar Singh is already married, but his eyes fall on Mary, who is not inclined to accept him. One day when Mary is coming back on a water-buffalo's back herding other cattle, Tehsildar Singh comes up to her and says:

> How pretty [...]. You look like Hema Malini.
>
> —What?
>
> —You look like Hema Malini.
>
> —You look like a monkey.

> Tehsildar Singh felt much encouraged by such a remark and came up close. Mary didn't stop her water-buffalo. As she moved on she took out a sharp machete and said in a lazy voice, Brokers like you, with tight pants and dark glasses, are ten a rupee on the streets of Tohri, and to them I show this machete. Go ask if you don't believe me. (Devi, "The Hunt" 9)

But Tehsildar Singh does not give up. He is very confident of his manliness. He tries to appease her by bringing her a nylon sari. Mary, on the contrary, is insulted by this. She throws it back at him in the presence of many people. She says, "You think I'm a city whore? You want to grab me with a sari? If you bother me again I'll cut off your nose. She goes off proudly swinging her arms" (10). Tehsildar Singh waits for an appropriate time. He is insulted, and wants to prove his masculinity. At the same time, he is careful because he is scared of the tribals. He wants to overpower Mary by showing signs of aggression. He wants to humiliate her for the injury she has caused to his male ego. One day

> Tehsildar caught Mary's hand one day.
>
> [....] He said, I won't let you go today.
>
> At first Mary was scared. Struggling she lost her machete. With great effort, after a good deal of struggling, Mary was able to spring out of his grasp. Both of them stood up. [...] Against the background of the spring songs Mary thought he was an animal. A-ni-mal. The syllables beat on her mind. (12)

Finding herself in a helpless situation, she quickly takes a tactful decision, and pretends to yield to Tehsildar's wishes. She says that she would accept him on the day of Janiparab when all the women would be out hunting. When that day arrives, Mary finds Tehsildar, catches him and strikes him down with the machete. Mary performs this on the day of the Festival of Justice when the elders bring offenders to justice. People don't go to the police for justice, for the hunting festival is meant to administer justice.

The story "Draupadi" is set in the background of the Naxalite activities of the period 1967-1972. The Naxalites of Bengal were disowned by the mainstream leftist parties, and were repressed by the forces of the State by 1972. The story "Draupadi" is set at a time when the process of Naxalite repression was at its peak and indicates the involvement of the tribals. The movement was hitherto run by the elite and the student radicals. The story is about Dopdi (tribal name for Draupadi), a tribal Naxal. Dopdi and her husband Dulna Majhi are underground. There have been search operations headed by Senanayak, who is well equipped with the knowledge of the activities of the naxals. This intensified effort results in Dulna Majhi getting killed in an 'encounter.' His body is kept as 'bait' in order to capture Dopdi, who however does not turn up. The search continues. In the process, innocent tribals are killed. Finally, the Senanayak is successful in capturing her for interrogation. After the interrogation, when the evening advances, Senanayak orders his men to "make her up" and "do the needful." Dopdi is subjected to multiple rape and abandoned. She refuses to cover herself and confronts Senanayak with her bare body.

Here Dopdi is a symbol of social change that has been taking place among the tribals. She protests against subjugation and injustice. Unlike the Draupadi of *Mahabharata* who prays for clothes to cover herself, she fights with a bare body. Perhaps by using the myth, Mahasweta Devi is showing the continuity of exploitation from the days of the *Mahabharata* to the present times. Here, Draupadi is not supported by Krishna, yet she makes an attempt to assert herself: "Draupadi comes closer. Stands with her hand on her hip, laughs and says, The object of your search, Dopdi Mejhen. You asked them to make me up, don't you want to see how they made me?" (104). Her insistence on remaining naked is an indication from her that male aggression stops before such gestures.

The story "Arjun" is an example of exploitation of the tribals by local moneylenders and their control of the tribal region. Bishal Mahato and Ram Haldar are influential people. They force the Sabars to fell trees, and the Sabars by doing this land in jail. Bishal Mahato summons Ketu Sabar and asks him to fell the Arjun tree. However, Ketu does not want to fell the tree. Mahato assures him that the latter will not be arrested. Still, Ketu is reluctant because he is aware that the Arjun tree is closely associated with his culture. This particular tree is the only surviving relic of the Bandhini jungles from the Zamindari era. It still evokes "memories of the past in the minds of Ketu and his friends" (181). The elders of the tribe still respect the Arjun tree. They believe that it is the manifestation of the divine. Ketu and his friends Banamali, Diga and Pitambar decide what to do. They are determined that they

should protect the tree. They decide to save the tree because it is revered by all—the Sabars, Kharias and Oraons. Diga suggests that they should gather around the Arjun tree and worship it. Mahato and Haldar are afraid. They know the tree and the people, but today they are unable to comprehend them. They seem like strangers. Here the tribals are able to overcome the landlords, but it is not always the case. It is so difficult to come out of the clutches of the moneylenders. The tribals are at the mercy of the dominant society.

The story "Salt" is a good example of the helpless condition of the tribals and the oppressive behaviour of the moneylenders. Uttamchand Bania is the moneylender and big businessman in the tribal region. His forefathers came to this village just a few decades ago. Uttamchand not only controls the economy now, but political affairs as well. The tribals used to cast their votes since the fourth election. Uttamchand in fact manipulates this. He says "Why walk all the way from the forests? Here is a rupee for each of you my brothers and sisters. I am here to cast the votes for you". But in 1977 a change takes place in this pattern. With the initiative of the Primary School teacher Balkishen Singh the tribals go in person and cast their own votes. This invites the wrath of Uttamchand. He is annoyed with the election issue and decides to "finish them off by deprivation of salt." He says, "Let them have a taste of saltless gruel. Such ingratitude after being fed by me for so long!" (102). He thinks that these people have eaten his salt, 'namak,' and in spite of that they have turned 'namak haram' (ungrateful). Salt is also associated with the freedom movement. The point here seems to be that wherever tribals make the slightest move

towards freedom, it is branded as betrayal. Perhaps it is to reverse this association between freedom and betrayal that Gandhi organized the salt satyagraha.

The story "Shishu" is also an example of the writer's aim to subvert the prevalent notions about the tribals. The tribals are called 'shishu' or children. This has something to do with the colonial perception of the natives. As Ashis Nandy points out:

> Colonization dutifully picked up these ideas of growth and development and drew a new parallel between primitivism and childhood. What was childlikeness of the child and childishness of immature adults now also become the lovable and unlovable savagery of primitives and primitivism. (Nandy 15-16)

Following the colonial perception, the Indian dominant class also looks at the tribals as immature and child-like figures. This has been problematized in the story. The story is located in Lohri in Ranchi district. This region is affected by drought and famine. The Block Development Officer (BDO) and the Relief Officer come to distribute relief among the tribals. The relief officer Mr. Singh is on duty for a few days. He wants to distribute relief materials in the famine-affected area. He has a false notion about the tribals. He thinks that "the adivasi men played flute and that adivasi women danced with flowers bedecking their hair. And he had thought of them running from one hill to another singing..." (237). However, he finds them to be different. Through his conversation with the BDO he is informed that the tribals

attribute each calamity to the wrath of some supernatural force and that they sing to drive it away. The BDO says: "Lohri. That's a bad place. A bad place. Give them land—they simply sell it to the moneylender. Then they place a countercharge on us. 'Where's water? And seeds, the plow, the bullocks? How are we to till the land?' And if you supply them with those, they sell them too." (Devi, *Imaginary* 237). The BDO warns the Relief Officer of theft by the tribals and tells him about the Agaria uprising and the Agaria myth. The government wanted to set up factories and mines in this region, disturbing the peace and tranquility of the indigenous people. The tribals resisted this move. The State went ahead with its plan, blasting the hills. Enraged by such intervention the Agarias of Kuva village had killed every man from the team who had assisted in the blast, and ran away into the forests. Extensive operations to catch the criminals were launched, but with no result. At last the Government resorted to a ruthless combing operation. The police set fire to Kuva and sowed the earth with salt so that nothing would grow there, and left. The Agaria village had thus suffered on account of ruthless taxation, oppression and terrible persecution. The honest Relief Officer starts his work, sets up the camp and starts relief operations. As Mahasweta Devi writes:

> The camp began the very next day and was run in a most disciplined manner. Gruel was prepared and distributed. The medical volunteers gave injections for cholera and typhoid. The camp hummed with activity.

> Now people started coming from distant villages. Even at night one could see processions of hungry people moving toward the camp with flaming torches. [...]
>
> Singh became so deeply involved in the relief work that the scorched earth, the dense forest of dwarfed and leafless trees, and the copper-red and gray hungry hills lost their horror, and the starving hungry populace became top priority. (Devi, "Shishu" 245-46)

He is respected by the people. He is alert during the night. He awakes at the sound of footsteps to see whether somebody is stealing the sacks and milo. He gives them a chase as the sacks are carried away through the forest. But on the way he realizes that they are not ghosts but 'children' of men. He runs behind the thieves and reaches "the wilderness of stunted grass where, in the legendary past, Jwalamukhi had fought with the sun god" (Devi, "Shishu" 248). The children who are being chased by Singh stop, put down the sacks and approach him:

> Suddenly they moved closer. Boys and girls in a group. And fear struck at him, a great fear, leaving him immobile. Moving forward together, they made a circle around him and stood still. But why?
>
> They looked at him and he watched them warily. The circle moved in. Singh turned his head and found that the circle was complete. [...] They were human beings born of human parents, not spectral beings. [...]

'We are not children. We are Agarias of the village of Kuva.

("Shishu" 248-249)

Singh realizes that they are not children but adults. They themselves tell them that they are the Agarias of Kuva who killed the outsiders to protect their hills. They seek revenge against Singh merely because of his height of five feet and nine inches, the normal growth of his body, which they were not able to achieve because of being deprived of food for so long. They also indicate—as he himself realizes, too—that people like him are responsible for the sad predicament of the tribal people.

Looking at these stories one can group Mahasweta Devi's fiction into two categories—one, concerning tribal history and culture, and the other concerning tribal reality—their deprivation, degradation, exploitation and their struggle for survival. Her fiction suggests that the tribals had a rich and glorious past. Her efforts have been to unearth their cultural past and draw the attention of the dominant class to it and urge them to recognize it. At the same time she is aiming at creating awareness among the tribals. One may ask whether the tribals read the writings by her. The answer is yes. Maitreya Ghatak, who has edited the activist writing of Mahasweta Devi in a book titled *Dust on the Road* mentions this in his Introduction:

> In 1992, I was doing fieldwork in a tribal village in the Medinipur district of West Bengal, for the National Institute of Adult Literacy. The village had just passed through an intensive literacy campaign and the purpose of the research was to see if any reading habit was retained

> after the campaign was withdrawn. The general complaint was that there was no reading material. In a village, a young tribal boy brought out a book, an abridged version of Mahasweta's *Birsa Munda*, written specifically for young readers. He said that this book was read by everyone of his community; it was through this book that they had learnt a lot about Birsa Bhagawan. The boy was a Munda. The book was also translated into the Ho language in Bihar. (Ghatak xi)

Unlike the writers discussed earlier, Mahasweta Devi does not privilege the tribal community over the other communities living with them. She writes about them with the same concerns, since they are also oppressed by the dominant class. For intance in "Douloti the Bountiful" she narrates the story of a Harijan girl. Mahasweta Devi's attitude to the non-tribal backward sections of India's population should be contrasted with that of Gopinath Mohanty who has negative things to say about the Harijans (Dombs) who live with the tribals. She also does not fail to recognize the voluntary work done by missionaries such as Fr. Blumful and non-tribals like Mr. Srivastava, the Primary School teacher who makes an attempt to rescue the bonded labourers in the story "Douloti the Bountiful." Such good deeds are largely ignored by Mohanty and Karanth, who have derogatory things to say about them, particularly the missionaries working among the tribals. Moreover, Mohanty's world of the tribal is a romanticized one. He finds them happy, dancing, singing, and celebrating, whereas Mahasweta Devi finds the tribals to be struggling for survival. They are always under subjugation in her fictional world. This is because of Mahasweta Devi's

own ideological predilections which wants the tribal situation to be transformed and for which she invites the attention of the mainstream through her writings. She pleads for an egalitarian society. Mohanty, on the other hand, was more interested in the cultural aspects of the tribal world. He was impressed by their close association with nature and their philosophy, their life and social relations, and customs. Therefore his novels highlight these aspects of tribal life. Mahasweta Devi, as an activist writer, lays emphasis on the existential problem of the tribals instead of just confining herself to the cultural eulogization of the tribals.

Further she does not eroticise tribal sexuality. As Hansdak points out: "Mention of dances, courtship rituals and erotic nudity are conspicuously absent from her writings"(82). She also does not celebrate the tribal woman's sexuality, but uses it as an instrument of change. In her fiction, women are not there to attract the outsiders, but to teach them a lesson. The major characters of Mahasweta Devi's stories such as Dopdi or Mary Oraon, are agents of transformation. Although she does not eroticise the tribal body, she does glorify it. Mahasweta Devi would just say: "This body is dark, healthy, virile and beautiful"(Hansdak 83). One may argue that this is again patronizing, and is just another way of glorifying the tribals. This might be so. Her involvement and desire to do something for them might have prompted her to develop this attitude which is reflected in her fiction.

Her involvement with the tribals has given her a better understanding of tribal reality. She has picked up tribal dialects, idioms and proverbs and used them in her

writings. Even the distorted forms of English words such as 'Gormen' (in "Douloti") and 'commis' (in "Pterodactyl") which are in currency in tribal regions are exploited by Mahasweta Devi. She has familiarized herself with the laws, programmes and projects meant for tribals from the local level to the international level. All these minute details concerning tribal life in her fiction lend an authentic touch to her fiction.

Her contact with the tribal people has also given her adequate knowledge and materials for her stories. Most of the characters in her fiction are not merely imaginary but people she has personally met. About Nagesia, a character in "Douloti the Bountiful,"she says:

> I saw Crook Nagesia with my own eyes in the month of June, just before the rainy season. Palamu has very little rainfall. Under the burning sun the landlord loads the bullock cart with paddy and tells the man to pull the cart to the local market. He could not do it. He fell under it. He was crushed. He became twisted and crooked for the rest of his life. I asked the landlord why he did it. [...] 'You are an upper-caste person,' he said. 'These bullocks are costly. If I send a bullock, it will suffer in the heat and it might collapse. But these bonded labourers don't count for much. A man can be wasted, a bullock cannot.' This was his argument, the perennial argument [...] I have named the village Seora . But there are such villages everywhere in

> Palamu. [...] the sale of girls for rape still goes on. Douloti is still true, and true for the rest of India. (Devi, *Imaginary* xiii-xiv)

This passage not only speaks about the detailed documented reality of her works, but also "shows how she transcends the boundaries of material concerns, and highlights the need for a universal consciousness of exploitation. And the strength to protest against it" (Ghatak x). Nelson Mandela while handing her the Jnanpith award rightly pointed out: "She holds a mirror to the conditions of the world as we enter the new millennium" (qtd. in Ghatak x). However, in spite of all the wealth of her experience, even Mahasweta Devi remains an outsider. Her experience is acquired and not lived as is the case of the tribal. We shall foreground this difference in the next and concluding chapter by considering some narratives written by the tribals themselves, and focusing on a body of writing which is inward and subjective. This hopefully will give us a balanced view, and allow us to see this in relation to the 'outsider representations' we have explored so far.

Notes

[1] Since the novel is yet to be translated into English I have used the Hindi translation of the novel known as *Sal Girah Ki Pukar Par* (1984).

[2]This and the subsequent quotes from the novel *Aranyer Adhikar* are translated by me from the Oriya version of the novel as the English translation of the novel is not yet available.

[3] Though my study concerns itself with representation of tribal people, here a Harijan or a Dalit character is discussed as Mahasweta Devi's writings show concern for the problems of the Dalits as well. For Mahasweta Devi both these communities are subject to more or less the same kind of exploitation.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

From the Tribals' Own Point of View

I

In the previous chapters we discussed representations of Tribal India by outsiders, starting from the colonial narratives of Anglo-Indian writers to those written by Indian writers in English and in Indian languages. In the former, we observed that tribals were either represented as savages who had to be civilized or were glorified as noble savages. Kipling's short story "TheTomb of His Ancestors" is a good example of this tendency. Here the tribals are treated as savages and immature people who can easily be tamed. The story also projects the imperial attitudes of the writer who was "certain that to be ruled by the British was India's right; to rule India was Britain's duty" (Nandy 64). Elwin's accounts on the other hand celebrate tribal culture and appreciate many aspects of tribal life, which his own society in the West lacked. The community-based life of the tribals, the participation of women in all aspects of social life, and living in harmony with Nature, were a few aspects which he finds unique in tribal society. Elwin celebrates tribal woman and her beauty in his writings. Some of these Anglo-Indian writers relied on anthropological ideas, and highlighted the aspects which they found strange and interesting. For instance, we find ethnographical details about their food, dress, and height in John Masters' narratives, reinforcing stereotypical images. Mary Louis Pratt in her study of colonial

representation sums up how all these help in reinforcing stereotypical images. She rightly points out: " Manners-and-customs description could serve as a paradigmatic case of the ways in which ideology normalizes, codifies and reifies. Such reductive normalizing is sometimes seen as the primary or redefining characteristic of ideology" (Pratt 121). By highlighting the manners, customs and other sociological and anthropological details, these writers reify the image of the tribals as people strange and different from themselves. Some narratives of this period described the tribals as barbarians and deceivers. Administrative reports and legal documents of the British period gave evidence of this kind of attitude of the British towards the tribals.

For the Indian English writers we discussed too, the tribals were 'the Others.' Coming from an urban and middle-class background, these writers perceived tribal society as primitive in relation to their own. Tribal India was seen as a primitive world untouched by modernity, materialism and corruption. Arun Joshi's novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is a fine example of this kind of depiction. Moreover, in these narratives, the tribals acquire stereotypical characterizations as brave and loyal people. Markandaya's *Coffer Dams* and Malgonkar's *The Princes* reify these stereotypes.

Writers who wrote in Indian languages (though they are not a homogenous lot) have a better understanding of Tribal India than the Indian English writers discussed so far have, because of their social interaction with the tribals. However, they too remain outsiders. They normally come from towns to study and write about

the tribals as they are concerned with the tribal population and their problems. For instance, Gopinath Mohanty and K. Shivarama Karanth find a number of good things in tribal culture and want the tribals to keep these intact. They are concerned with the degradation and disintegration of tribal culture. Hence they campaign for the preservation of tribal culture through their fiction. In their attempt to appreciate tribal people they depict the tribal men as handsome, muscular, strong and sincere, and tribal women as beautiful, sensuous and innocent. On the other hand the men and women from dominant and non-tribal classes are shown as cunning, vulgar and corrupt. Even the so-called low-caste communities who have close contact with the tribals for centuries are portrayed in negative terms. Because of the writers' preference for the tribals, people from the other communities are presented in a bad light. These writers celebrate the tribal woman's body by describing her physique and by depicting her in sensuous scenes. According to these writers, the advent of modernity in any form is a sign of degradation of tribal culture. They are critical of the aliens including the missionaries and fail to see the merits of their work for social uplift. Also, they are afraid that the new religion may disturb the indigenous belief system of the tribals and their culture as a whole. Mahasweta Devi however, recognizes the contribution of the missionaries for the upliftment of the tribals. She never makes fun of them in her writings.

Mahasweta Devi's engagement with the tribals is more sustained and hence more fruitful. Her representation of the tribals differs from that of Mohanty and Karanth. In her fiction one sees the tribals as humans and not as idealized

characters. As mentioned in Chapter 7, instead, the author portrays the poverty-stricken, insecure lives in the tribal areas where rice remains an eternal dream, where life means wandering from one village to another due to their ceaseless eviction by the 'dikus' (outsiders), where the land and the forest has been the basis of tribal life, where the forest holds the tribal economy, and where the issue of rights of the forest raises a tempest and causes a blood-spilling fight. Her mission has been to help the tribals realize their rich and significant history. She also urges the mainstream to recognize the rich cultural heritage of Tribal India. That has been a significant theme of her fiction. As a social reformer and activist she wants to do away with the injustice and oppression inflicted on the tribals by the dominant class. In her fiction she lays bare the oppression suffered by the tribals, especially the atrocities against tribal women. She also exposes the exploitative behaviour of the dominant class on the tribals in general. Her short stories such as "Shishu," "Salt," and "Arjun" express these concerns. However, one notes that in her fiction the tribals always are a struggling lot. Their songs, dances, merrymaking and other forms of cultural practices hardly find a place in Mahasweta Devi's fiction. In other words, for Mahasweta Devi, a tribal is always struggling for food, clothes, shelter and justice. He is hardly found depicted in delighted and happy mood. It is true that tribal life as such is difficult and not so easy-going. However, one feels that some aspects of tribal life such as their delightful nature, sense of contentment and other values are overlooked in Mahasweta Devi's fiction. The writer's ideology, activism and reforming zeal perhaps prompt her to view tribal people as a struggling lot. She also wants the attention of the mainstream to be focused on the injustice and

suffering of the tribal people. This kind of representation gives us only a partial view of tribal society and certainly not its totality. However, the tribals are not romanticized and exoticized by her as done by Mohanty and Karanth in their fiction, but are depicted as humans. Mahasweta Devi's involvement with the tribals and her painstaking efforts to document tribal reality makes her fiction more realistic than that of Mohanty and Karanth. She also gathers a lot of facts about tribal life from different sources such as government records, historical documents, oral narratives, laws, and medicine, and makes creative use of all these. Lars Ole Sauerberg in his work *Fact into Fiction* (1991) calls this mode of representation "documentary realism" and Mahasweta Devi's work fits this description. Thus, it will be seen that all these writers project the limited aspects of tribal life in accordance with their own concerns and choices, though in Mahasweta Devi we can see a greater authenticity. But it is necessary to complete the picture ever so slightly by concluding with a consideration of a select number of narratives written by the tribals themselves in order to understand their own modes of representation. This is by no means exhaustive, and clearly a lot more needs to be done, but it will hopefully give hints of the lie of the tribal land and provide pointers to further and more detailed and sophisticated work in this respect.

II

In the remainder of this chapter we shall discuss the works of a few tribal writers from different parts of India. One must again emphasize that this is not an exhaustive survey, but only a small glimpse into a vast terrain of literature and experience. Tribal writings can be divided into two forms: Oral Literature and Written Literature.

The tribals have a rich oral literature in the forms of songs, tales, riddles, etc. Though these are older than the written literature of mainstream tradition, they have been given a lower status than the written word. Now-a-days they come to us in the form of translation. A number of anthropologists and writers have gathered these oral forms and translated them into Indian languages and into English. The efforts made in this regard by Verrier Elwin, A .K. Ramanujan, Sitakant Mahapatra, Temsula Ao, G. N. Devy, and B. K. Tripathy, to mention a few, are noteworthy. Apart from the theme of protest, other aspects of their life too are reflected in their literature. Their unwritten literature has songs about love, ritual, joy and sorrow. They are sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments. They also show that tribal life is vibrant.

Modern tribal literature is not narrow but its horizon is large. It aims at self-representation, and the search for tribal identity or 'adivasiness.' Through this writing the tribals try to demolish the perception of the non-tribal writer that *adivasi* culture is backward and superstitious. Written tribal literature is the result of modern education

and social consciousness. Unlike Dalit literature, tribal writing is yet to establish itself as a normative form. Nevertheless, both of them have a number of affinities. Both are for social awakening. Like Dalit literature, Tribal literature is also alive to reality and calls for social change. Waharu Sonawane, the noted tribal literary activist outlined the characteristics of tribal literature in his Presidential Address to the Fifth Adivasi Sahitya Sammelan held at Palghar in Maharastra in December 1990. He declared that tribal literature has a "sense of movement and is a step towards social action. It has grown out of consciousness and awareness, and it critiques society" (20).

It must be stated that these texts come to us through translations. In this sense, the representation of tribal life though depicted by the tribals themselves, may not be as authentic as the original. The translation process may have hampered the authenticity of the representation. However one can argue that though the translation process may distort the style, structure, syntax, etc of the text, it will at least retain the meaning and the thematic content which would enable us to examine how tribals have been depicted in these works. Hence these texts, which feature under the rubric called Tribal Literature, even if they are in translation are taken for discussion. In any case, our objective, as mentioned in the introduction, is not to question the authenticity of the representation depicted in these narratives, but to understand how Tribal India has been depicted over a period of time; and how the socio-political situations, and the ideology of the writers are responsible for the representation of the tribals in such representations.

Apart from the writings of educated tribal writers who have started writing about their own experiences in the form of stories, novels, autobiographies, and poems, there are magazines in different tribal as well as recognized Indian languages which provide tribal writers a platform to express themselves. Magazines like *Budhan, Dhol* (Drum), *Sirjan* (Creativity), *Haryar Sakam* (Green Leaf), and *Alari* (Divine Light) are a few examples. Tribal writers who have made a name for themselves and committed themselves to writing are—Laxman Gaikwad, Laxman Mane, Kishore Shantabai Kale (from Maharastra), Mangal Ch. Soren, Sarada Prasad Kisku, Ramdas Majhi Tudu, (from Chotanagpur), Lummer Dai, Rongbong Terang, Easterine Iralu (from the North-East), and others. In order to include the writings of tribal writers, Ramanika Gupta the editor of *Yudh Rat Aam Admi* (*The Ever-Struggling Common-man*) has recently brought out a special issue of the journal on the tribal theme in two volumes. These volumes, titled *Adivasi Swar Aur Nai Satabdi* (*Adivasi Voice and the New Century*) contain poems, folklore, short stories, and plays. The volumes have fourteen short stories and the abstracts of two novels written in different Indian languages and translated into Hindi. These writers respond to the social order which has been exploitative in nature. Their writings deal with social awakening and social consciousness. The focus is intimately related to social reality, and is not imaginary or entertainment-oriented. It deals with the struggle for survival, daily problems, and the hopes and aspirations of the tribal people. However, it has

adopted the styles of folktales and folk narratives. These writings are attuned to what Sonawane looks forward to:

> Our responsibility henceforward should be to create a literature that will give us historical justice. Dramas, stories, *povadas*, rodalya songs must be written on such adivasi heroes as Tantya Bhil, Bhagoji Naik, Birsa Munda, Rani Durgavati, Ramdas Maharaj, Ambarsing Mahara, and others. Literature must be created to bring about a new dawn for the adivasi. [...]
>
> If we can create such literature for a liberated human society we all want, the first reward is sure to come from our own society.
>
> (Sonawane 20)

Most of the narratives that we shall be discussing in the following pages fulfill these criteria. In the field of written Tribal Literature, the tribal writers in Marathi have done pioneering work. In order to discuss some aspects which are distinct in self-representation, I shall analyse three texts which are representative of a pattern in tribal writing. These are Laxman Gaikwad's autobiographical novel in Marathi, *Uchalya* (1987) translated as *The Branded* (1997), Laxman Mane's *Upara* (1980) translated as *An Outsider* (1997), and Kishore Shantabai Kale's *Kolhatyache Por* (1994), which literally means *A Kolhati's Child*, but was translated as *Against All Odds* (2000). The above texts were originally in Marathi and translated into English. It is to be pointed out that these three texts can narrowly be seen as autobiographies. However, they could also be largely called fiction. As J.A. Cuddon aptly points out, "an autobiography may be largely fictional" (63). As in fiction, the writer of

autobiography also selects what s/he wants to focus on. Here too, there is scope for the writer's intervention and manipulation. Also, like the fiction writer, the writer of an autobiography too has a point of view. After much debate, the Sahitya Akademi which published the English translations of *Uchalya* (*The Branded)* and *Upara* (*The Outsider)* called them autobiographical novels. I would like to discusss *The Branded* first, though it was published later than *An Outsider*, as the former deals with an important subject—the issue of Denotified Tribes.

Laxman Gaikwad comes from a tribal community called Uchalya which literally means 'pilferer.' The novel is about his experience in life as an individual from a branded community. The Uchalya tribe was branded as a criminal tribe by the colonial rulers. A brief narration at this point of how several tribes in India were categorized as criminal tribes would be helpful in understanding the novel. Anthropologists and historians argue that the British were responsible for categorizing certain groups in relation to their caste characteristics. Ronald Inden and Bernard Cohen argue that "reducing whole demographic groups to their caste characteristics was especially attractive to the colonial administrators as it gave them the illusion of knowing the caste system" (qtd. in Nigam 134). They further state that the category of 'criminal tribes' also bears the imprint of the colonial attitude. *Thugi* was mentioned as an Indian practice sanctioned and sustained by Hinduism. Philip Meadows Taylor's *Confessions of a Thug* and John Masters' *The Deceivers* highlight the religious dimension of the practice. Macleod and Hutchinson trace the genealogy of the criminal tribes to the thugs. However, they do not provide any details of these people springing from the same stock.

On the assumption that some tribes have a criminal nature inherent in them, the administrators and police officials submitted their reports and recommended that they should be branded as criminals. Nembhard, the Commissioner of East Berar argued in his report: "Para:3. Now every one of the tribals I have mentioned (the Banjara, the Kolatees, the Badhuks, the Kunjars and the Nuths) [...] are professional criminals [...], crime is their trade and they are born to it and must commit it" (qtd. in Nigam 134).

In recent years, scholars who have studied the history of certain ex-criminal tribes argue that the colonial belief that criminal nature is inherent in any tribe is a myth. Sanjay Nigam (1990), V. Lalitha (1995) and Malli Gandhi (1996) in their respective works specify the reasons that were responsible for the tribes to turn to criminal activities. One of these reasons was the colonial forest policy which denied the tribals their means of livelihood. Malli Gandhi in his unpublished dissertation titled *A Historical Survey of Ex-Criminal Tribes Settlements in Andhra* studies the Yerukula, Yanadhi, Lambadi, and Dommanna tribes that were notified as criminal tribes. He points out that there was no criminal behaviour during their life in the forest. They depended on the forest products. However, with the intrusion of the British government, their life patterns changed. Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil point out that as a consequence of encroachment, tribes devoted to hunting and collection of jungle produce led a nomadic life, and were not allowed to sell forest produce in accordance with the Criminal Tribes Act of 1878. They lost their

legitimate means of livelihood. The railways and roadways destroyed the business of the tribals. There was also encroachment by the outsiders. So the only alternative left to them for their survival on earth was thieving and looting. As a consequence of the Criminal Tribes Act, the tribes which were notified as criminal tribes were required to register themselves, with details of their family and means of livelihood. No registered person was allowed to leave his village without a licence issued by the officer in charge of the police station. It was in 1952 that Prime Minister Nehru repealed this Act. However, the police still retain arbitrary power under the existing law. The police can examine cases of individuals from time to time. Every registered offender is given a certificate and can be subjected to police enquiry at any point of time, and this means harassment and exploitation.

Laxman Gaikwad's novel deals with such a tribal community. Through his personal experience, Gaikwad talks about the whole Uchalya community which was described as a criminal tribe in 1871. Gaikwad himself has experienced poverty and misery as a member of the Uchalya community. He has suffered because of the stigma attached to his community. It is a fact that the British declared the community as criminals, but at present, the real perpetuators of this kind of stigma are the upper caste people. They have a parochial attitude towards the tribals, and look at them with contempt. A child from a higher caste can make fun of a grown-up person belonging

to this community. Gaikwad narrates how children in school used to tease him when he started going to school:

> I had just started going to school. It was all novel and strange to me. All the urchins started harassing me, as if a poor lamb had entered a pack of wolves. They threw stones at me because an Uchalya's child had dared come to school. They would taunt mockingly: *Lachiman Tata khekdyacha curry khata*. ['Lachman Tata eats crabs' curry.'] (Gaikwad 16)

He relates how he was ridiculed in the school when he made attempts to learn. He was discouraged at home as well. He was given a 'Bharat blade' instead of study materials. His father beat him up when Laxman wrote on the copy thinking that Laxman was spoiling it instead of keeping it blank. Laxman's sisters-in-law said that his going to school was a waste; instead, he should learn the craft of thieving. He was told: "What is there in school, learn thieving" (13). He was not given a house on rent because of his caste. In spite of his commitment to do something for the people he was defeated in the election as he did not have enough money and also because of caste hegemony. As a grown-up man without a decent profession and means to feed himself and his family he was worried about his fate. He felt that "a beggar's lot was far better than mine" (78).

The novel reflects the general attitude of the upper caste people towards tribals. When they see Laxman wearing good clothes, they cannot tolerate it:

> '[...] hell! This Pathrut's boy now moves about dressed like a saheb.' Others said: 'How poor he used to be.' God has blessed him. Now he works.' Some boys from rich families remarked: 'What works! [...] in hell! He is from the Uchalya community, will it ever mend itself! Lakshya must be in some thieves' gang, we're so educated and yet we cannot obtain jobs. How will this Pathrut's boy ever get a job?' (115)

Gaikwad's account also lays bare the corrupt practices of the police officials who instead of reforming and rehabilitating these people, add to their misery and encourage them to steal. Gaikwad mentions that the police can come to their house any time for inquiry. He recalls an example of the immoral behaviour of the police:

> The police caught our grandfather and dragged him to our hut, beating him severely all the way. They wanted to search our hut for stolen goods. [...]
>
> Grandfather was handcuffed and the police kept asking him: 'Tell us where you've hidden the stolen money and gold. Show or we'll smash your bones.'
>
> Grandfather wailed piteously: 'See Saab, see for yourself; there's nothing in the hut.'
>
> 'Your whore will know,' cried the police and grabbed our grandmother by the hair and thrashed her all over. [...] They squeezed grandmother's breasts, asking her to show the stolen goods.

> Then they left, taking grandfather with them. He was jailed for some months. (1-2)

The police would demand money. The family would borrow from the moneylender to give to the police. Then, they would have to resort to thieving to pay off the debts. Some members of the community are used as informers and are paid for the job. Gaikwad's narrative also attacks the State for its indifference and apathy towards their problems. He points out that India got Independence in 1947, but his community achieved it only five years later. He says: "It was when Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru 'denotified' the 'notified criminal tribes' on August 30, 1952, exactly five years and 16 days after the rest of India was officially declared 'free' that the Denotified Tribes could call themselves independent" (Gaikwad, "For the Chharas" 3).

Gaikwad attempts to organize his people in the factory and later to gain support from enlightened people such as Professor B.L. Gaikwad and his brother-in-law, D.S.Gaikwad. The fact that he has written a book on tribal issues exposing the cruelty of the upper class/caste society and depicting the misery of his own people is an act of assertion. Gaikwad's representation of his people/tribe is different from that of the colonizers who either perceived the tribals as noble savages or barbarians. This kind of writing is different from that of Gopinath Mohanty, Arun Joshi, Shivarama Karanth and indeed Mahasweta Devi. Though they are the early writers who have highlighted tribal culture and the problems faced by tribals, they remain as outsiders in spite of their involvement in and knowledge about the life and culture of the tribals.

Gaikwad's account is not based on curiosity and passion, but comes out of his own lived experience. He is open and clear in his narrative style. He does not try to defend his community by concealing facts, but is sincere in stating the realities of tribal life, and invites his readers to form their own judgement. His autobiographical narrative strategy makes the novel more forceful. The novel gives a fierce jolt to the established refined language, which is used by other narratives on the tribals, with its rustic dialect.

In the novel, the author plainly says that the tribals have indeed been engaged in these activities. However, one gets the feeling that the socio-economic factors and the arbitrary colonial rule are responsible for this situation. Through this novel the writer expresses the cruelty of the so-called civilized society, and draws the attention of mainstream society to the mores of his tribe. He is also asserting his own identity in the process.

Laxman Mane's Marathi novel *Upara* (1980) rendered in English as *An Outsider* (1997) is another work with this tendency. Mane gives a comprehensive but disturbing account of the life of another nomadic tribe called 'Kaikadi.' Born in 1949 Mane came up the hard way in life. Unlike Laxman Gaikwad, he was exposed to University education, and to the discourse of social justice in his college days. However, he suffered equally in his life as Laxman Gaikwad did. In his book, Mane gives us a glimpse of the life of the Kaikadi community. They are nomads. They settle down near a village for some days and then move on to another place. They

earn their living by collecting canes and by weaving baskets out of them. Some of them also sell metal ware. In the process of collecting canes, they confront a number of problems. Mane narrates how his father had a narrow escape from a king cobra while collecting canes. He also says that they are always suspected by the villagers and are subjected to severe punishment. They live in the outskirts of the village in filthy conditions:

> Leaving the donkeys on the outskirts of the hamlet, we would play, loitering behind these poor animals grazing on fresh human excrement and brandishing our sticks in the air. We played mostly with marbles or flat pebbles piling them on top of the other and smashing them with a ball from a certain distance. A shirt, someone's charity, covered my body. Mended in several places, it was full of wrinkles. Shorts were a luxury. (17)

The women are very often ill-treated by the villagers. Laxman narrates an incident where his aunt is picked up by the villagers while asleep and is raped by three or four people. Against all these odds, Laxman Mane tries to come up in life from his childhood. He has a strong desire to study and become a teacher. His parents are supportive in spite of their poverty and misery. He is subjected to the same kind of humiliation as Laxman Gaikwad when he joins a school. Mane says: "All the pupils started teasing me in the way the hens do when a strange chick intrudes upon their privacy" (20). Even the teacher would not take it easy. He would say: "You

funny guy! Do nomadic beggars go to school? [...] If they study, who will weave our baskets? Nothing doing!" (36). Another problem is that since his family moves from one place to other he has to change schools frequently. He comments: "My school was moving on the donkey's back" (69). But he never gives up. He does different odd jobs such as selling bread or cleaning dishes and continues his studies. He is also supported by some of his friends and teachers. Thus he manages to complete his school and join college. While in college, he works in the library as a part time employee. His services are terminated because he joins a protest rally. To add to his problem, he is in love with the daughter of his house owner. He and Shashi (the house owner's daughter) want to marry and plan to move to some other place. Since the girl is from a higher caste and higher in economic status, her parents are dead against the match when they come to know about it. However, the couple manage to escape and get married. Without a job they go through a lot of problems. His parents are also unhappy about the marriage and disown him forever. Mane wonders at the remarkable way that the same caste system against which he wants to fight is so embedded in the minds of the people of his own caste.

The book is a revealing account of the Kaikadi community. It reflects the misery and impoverishment of the people living in the twentieth century. They do not have a permanent roof over their heads, no permanent source of income to meet their basic needs, no education to assert themselves. They live in inhuman conditions. Laxman's mother laments: "Even a dog's life has a certain dignity, but not ours"(67).

However, amidst poverty and illiteracy, the tribe adheres to their customs and cultural practices. They bathe their gods and worship them regularly (85). They observe the rituals pertaining to marriages and other social customs. The tribes such as Kaikadi, Vaids, and Makadwale meet at Jejuri in the month of Kartik (close to November). During this period, marriages are fixed.

It is generally thought that these people have no social customs or notions of culture. From the illustration of social activities the prevalent idea is proved wrong. However, the social conventions are so rigid that the individual has to pay a heavy price for any violation, even to the extent of being excommunicated. If anyone violates any of them he/she will be excommunicated. Mane's parents are not only excommunicated because he marries someone outside his community, but are also forced to disown him. *Upara* in this sense is not only the life story of an individual but a socio-cultural testimony of the entire tribe. When one compares *Upara* with *Uchalya* one gets the feeling that *Upara* is more comprehensive in terms of providing a socio-cultural account of the community. *Uchalya* on the other hand, makes us think of the question of criminal tribes and their problems and less on cultural matters. However, both are significant in their own way.

The third piece *Against All Odds* written by Kishore Shantabai Kale narrates the plight of Tamasha women dancers from the Kolhati community. Kale himself belongs to this community. The book was written in Marathi as *Kolhatyache Por* (*Son of a Kolhati*) and published in 1994. This is a dramatic account of Kolhati women

who earn their living by performing dances and by entertaining men. In this process they are exploited by the dominant class. A girl child is sold after her puberty. After becoming a mother, she is abandoned. Then it becomes her responsibility to rear the child. The child does not know its father. So children generally retain their mother's name as their middle name. The narrative presents the shocking reality of this community which lives under a social stigma and are victims of atrocities. It highlights the poverty, illiteracy and inhuman living conditions of this community, and the author attempts to reform it so that his people can have a dignified place in society.

One could argue that even this narrative is qualified to be called a fiction as one can see here the same captivating narrative style that we find in Mane's *Upara*. The publisher of the book rightly claims in the blurb that "There is vigour of expression everywhere befitting a folk artist."

Going back again to Mane's *Upara,* one can observe so many stories within the narrative. Mane's father's narration about how he encounters the king cobra, his aunt's tragic story after she had been gang-raped, the narration regarding the ill-treatment of Mane's parents by the villagers are but a few examples. It is worth describing one of these:

> What once happened was the worst they feared. One day early in the morning, Mother and Father had gone to the neighbouring village to sell their wares. We children were at home. It was terribly hot and we lacked the courage to go out of the house. The village

appeared to be dead as no living creature was moving about. Not even a bird was seen flying. I had kept the stale hard pieces of Bhakri in some tamarind water. My stomach burned with hunger and it was very hot outside too. Tears rolled down my cheeks. There was nothing to eat in the house. Our patience was exhausted. We were eagerly waiting for our parents to return, hoping that either of them would return any moment with some pieces of bhakri [sic]. But they were nowhere in sight. Kisnya, the youngest of us, started crying. He would not calm down. Sami was making him drink water. But Kisnya had become pale with hunger. In my mind, I was cursing my parents. And just then I heard some pandemonium outside. Father was being pushed ahead by a small crowd. Mother was behind him. She had no blouse on. She was wearing father's shirt. Her sari was torn. Father had only his dhoti on. One could see black and blue lashes over his body. He was followed by four or five rough fellows. Mother was wailing loudly and father was consoling her.

We children were terrified. Crying, we ran to them. Mother lifted Kisnya and held him close to her and passed her hand through his hair. I went near her. Both her hands were stained with blood. Her face was swollen. My terrible cries created a din. Father's hands were tied, his head hung low in shame. Both of them were not brought home. Instead, they were taken to the village chief. In the meantime, the number of spectators began swelling. My mother's modesty… was

> covered with father's shirt. I was burning with inner anger. Even at my age, I could understand the situation. Mother was falling at the feet of her captors begging them to let her go home. However, one of them said: "Why the hell did you go in there? You deserve a good kick in your [...].'
>
> I wanted to do something...but I couldn't think of anything. (Mane 61-62)

We find a number of small narratives told in a folk narrative style and woven into the larger narrative. This is a unique feature in all these three narratives.

Tribal writers from the North East also employ folklore mode of presentation in their writings. Many short stories of the Nagamese writer Easterine Iralu's *The Windover Collection* (2000) show this trend. These stories express tribal beliefs, traditions, social attitudes and aspirations in simple and lucid language. But she is not alone in this. In the North East tribal writers such as Lummer Dai, Yese Dorje, Thongsi, Rongbong Terang, Bhaben Pegu, Rajen Pame, and Jatin Mipun have been writing in different languages. The works of some of these writers (Estherine Iralu's, for instance) are available in English and they prove that these writers present their society and culture from the angle of vision of someone who is an integral part of the culture.

It is pertinent here to discuss these writings, particularly the fiction, which appear in the special issue of *Yudh Rat Aam Admi* (*The Ever-Struggling Common People*) edited by Ramanika Gupta. The writers of these stories come from different

tribal communities. As writers, they are not much discussed, nor is their fiction well-known. Replying to a query on television, Mahasweta Devi once pointed out that the fact that they are writing is enough. It may sound unjust to compare them with the established canonical writers and their masterpieces. Nevertheless, these fictional works are the result of the experience of the tribals and the issues confronted by them. It is their literature. Moreover, this act of relating the fiction written by the tribals to the fiction written by the non-tribal writer is done not with an intention to question the authenticity of their work but to understand the question of representations of Tribal India in these works.

Through these works, the tribals attempt to assert their identity. The exploitation of tribals by the contractors, police personnel and politicians are some of the recurring themes in these works. They also try to invoke the past in order to inculcate the spirit of courage and commitment among the tribal youth. Peter Paul Ekka's novel *Jungle Ke Geet* or *The Song of the Forest* is based on Birsa's revolution. It is meant to evoke enthusiasm and commitment among tribal youth to work for their own people just as Birsa gave his life for his own people. Ekka in another story called "Raj Kumar Ke Desh Mein" ("In the Land of the Prince") highlights the exploitation of tribal people by village heads, sarpanches, contractors and police. Narayan's Malayalam novel *Kochereti* (*Dear Sister*) on the other hand highlights a unique social system that is prevalent among the Wynad tribe in Kerala. In this community one has the right to marry his/her cousin. But in the novel the young people make attempts to break the social conventions. Shankar Lal Meena's novel *Sapnowali Wohi Dubli*

Ladki (*The Slim Girl of the Dream*) is about a girl who has been an inspiring figure for the educated youth. In Dinanath Manohar's story "Sthitiantar" or "The Situation After" the police, the landlord and the administrative officials exploit the villagers in front of the headman, Bhunya Baba. Bhunya Baba had once cut off the hand of Giridhari's son. He becomes a hero in the village, but a criminal according to the law. He is taken to prison. But the whole village waits for him. But later, the system has changed. The mode of exploitation also has changed. In the name of democracy the rulers exploit the people. The administration does not try to understand the social system and social hierarchy prevalent there. Inspector Jadhav comes and beats up the Bhils. Sunya Naik, a member from the community, alleged to have cut off the Patil's son's hand is arrested in front of Bhunya Baba, but the latter, as a headman is not able to do anything. Bhunya Baba feels helpless. He could get the support of his villagers five years back when he was punished for cutting off the landlord's son's elbow. The villagers were waiting to receive him when he came back from jail. But this time he feels totally helpless. The villagers do not come to his rescue. As the writer says: "Bhunya Baba came back to Bhillari [the dwelling place of the Bhils]. Even though he had strength in his shoulders and his weapon was sharp, he became weak. He could not help people who came running to him for help." (Gupta 207; translation mine). "Aur Jungle Shant Hua" ("And the Jungle Calmed Down") is a story about the change that has been taking place within tribal society. It also deals with the question of keeping one's tradition alive. Banka Baba is good at playing the Dhol or 'drum.' Whenever he beats his drum, the entire village comes together and everyone appreciates his art. But later, the Dhol is replaced by the Band. On the occasion of his

own grandson's marriage, Banka Baba's own son would not ask him to play the drum. Instead, he gets a Band to perform. Baba is very sad. He repairs his Dhol two days before the marriage. The procession comes and the band is being played. When he is not called, he takes his Dhol to the jungle and plays: the whole village assembles there to listen. The jungle vibrates with the sound of his Dhol and calms him down. This story is a fine instance of the writer's social concerns. His aim is to spread awareness among the tribal people on the need to keep their traditions alive. In Shankar Lal Meena's story "Aghoshit" ("Unannounced"), the protagonist Rajulal is bent before the system. Rajulal had paid the tax, but has not preserved the receipt. Later, even though he finds it out and takes it to show it in time, he is not sanctioned a loan. As a result he is not able to sow seeds in the field. Unable to face the problem in the village, he leaves the village. His son who has been watching all this also leaves the village. Later three people in the village—the Patwari and his two associates—are killed. This shows that the new generation does not believe in the traditional way of settling problems through village Panchayats and so on, but resorts to radical measures. Unlike Pritam, Jatru, the protagonist of Walter Bhengra's story "Khakhara Ka Jatru" is a humble and understanding person. He comes back to serve his village after completing his research, even though he is offered better jobs abroad. This shows that the writer has a clear purpose behind writing this story i.e., to urge the educated youth to come back to their soil instead of migrating to the cities. This story also shows the jubilant and fun-loving nature of the tribal people, which is ignored by an otherwise sympathetic writer like Mahasweta Devi in her writings. Word of the work of Jatru among the villagers reaches far and wide, and the media persons also

come to know about it and come to the village to interview Jatru. On the arrival of the media persons the entire village is jubilant:

> The entire village is talking about Jatru: old, young, men, women, all are talking about Jatru. The news can even sway the crops of the fields. Everybody is talking about Jatru. Young girls are talking about it near the village well. Women are talking about it in front of somebody's courtyard. The entire village is linked to Jatru's life. The entire village is talking about Jatru. (Bhengra 150)

If we want an example of jubilation, tribal songs give ample testimony to the joyous life of the tribals. For instance, take the case of a Bhil song sung on the occasion of the birth of a child. The song expresses the happiness of the tribal people:

> Listen, my home is singing,
> Echoing with pangs of birth,
> Listen, my heart is beating
> Throbbing with the hurt of birth
>
> Listen to the new-birth rhythms
> Rustling in my naked arms
> Listen to the sounds of sucking
> As new lips cling to my breast

Listen to the sounds of night

Crowding in to join the song,

Listen to my voice rejoicing—

A child is born, a child is born. (Khare 79)

A similar jubilant ambience is hardly found in Mahasweta Devi's fiction, but as I indicated above, this is because her forms and concerns are different.

Krushna Chandra Tudu's "Ek Bitta Jamin" and Rose Kerketta's "Bhanwar" talk about the rights of women to parental property. It is to be noted that tribal writers are sensitive to women's issues. However, they do not exoticise or romanticize tribal women. Pyare Kerketta's story "Beratha Biha" suggests that Adivasis keep their indigenous traditions intact even if they convert themselves to Christianity. They do practice their rituals and perform rites while being Christians at the same time. Manju Jyotsna's story "Prayaschit" gives an instance of the simplicity of the tribal mind. The protagonist is a rickshaw puller. He is also good at beating drums. The whole family is immersed in singing and dancing. Later, they get a daughter-in-law who is not only bad looking, but also has a harsh voice. But she is very good at housework. She earns and brings home money. But she is sterile. She is criticized by her mother-in-law and neighbours. Unable to cope with this ill treatment, she goes to her mother's house and commits suicide. With the death of his wife, the protagonist takes to drinking. One day he comes home with a bad-looking woman. The woman sells liquor. In the

meantime some customer leaves his seed in her womb. The protagonist mistakes it for his own seed and marries the woman and brings her home.

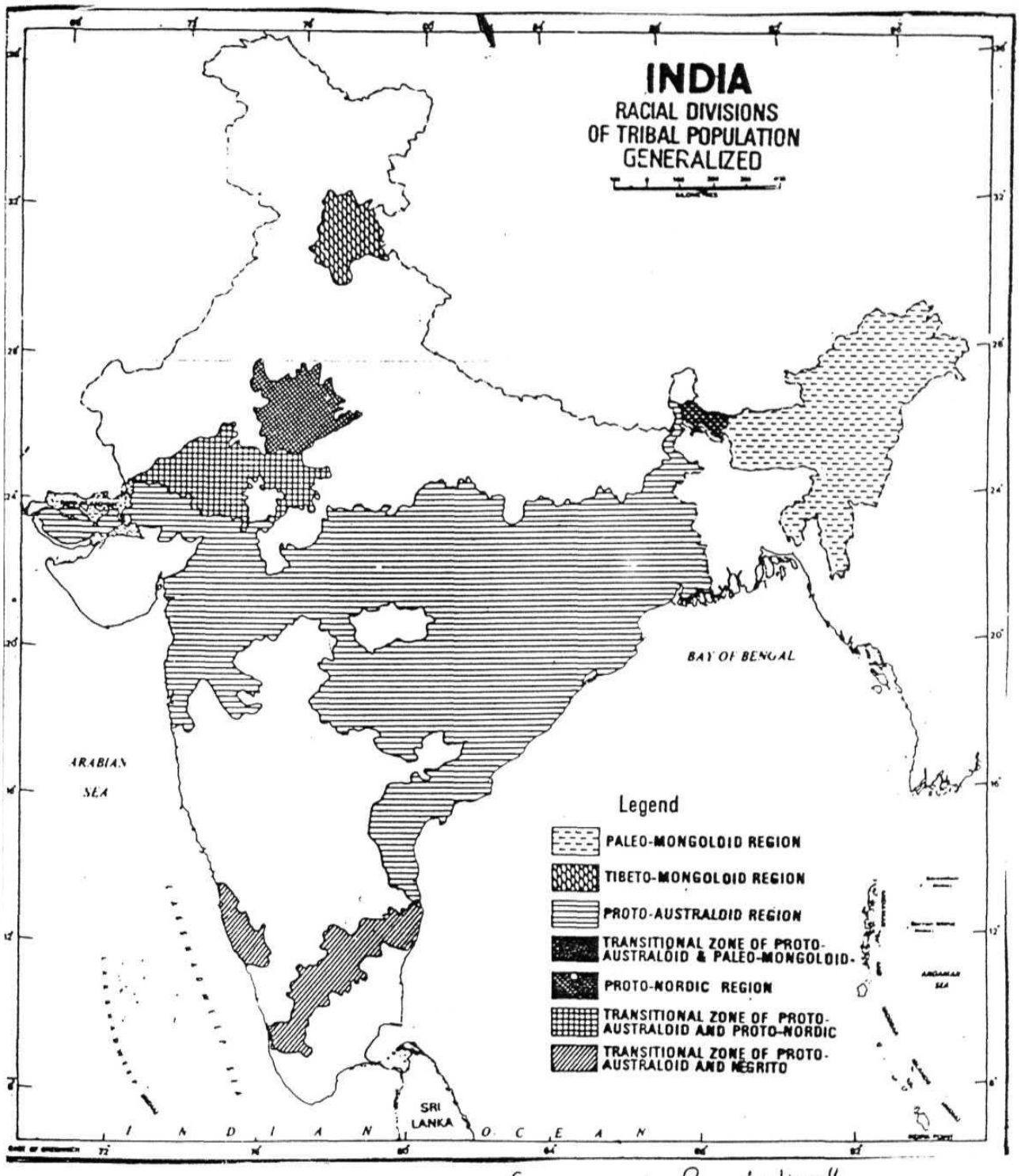
III

We observe from this brief analysis of the select writings of the tribals, that the tribal writers talk about their daily problems—food, clothing and wandering life—and not in addition to describing the idyllic beauty of the forest and depicting tribal women. They are sensitive when they represent their women. Their writings do not portray tribal women as wild, sensuous and seamy, but depict them as human beings taking part in every aspect of the family and society. We also see interaction between the tribals and mainstream society—government officials coming to their villages and tribal people interacting with officials of their locality. In contrast, non-tribal writers (for instance, Arun Joshi) find the tribals in the deep forest living in peace and tranquility in isolation, far away from the mainstream—dancing, drinking, merrymaking, and leading a savage life, Tribal writers are socially conscious and feel that it is their responsibility to make people aware of the socio-cultural reality. They write stories, novels and other forms of literature for these purposes. Tribal writers are different from the earlier writers in their representations of Tribal India. They don't give a romantic picture of tribal life and culture, nor do they present tribals as people rebelling against the system all the time, as Mahasweta Devi tends to do. They also do not give priority or patronage to the tribals over other communities, but present tribals as part of the larger society. The tribes are shown as marginalized but

having a distinct way of life. They seem quite comprehensive in their representation of themselves. These narratives are usually in a folk narrative style. They use idioms, proverbs, even slang which is also part of their culture. Unlike the earlier writers, these writers do not make special efforts to highlight some specific and strange aspects of their culture. Tilottoma Misra, who has studied the fiction of the tribals of the North-East, shows how the outsider is selective in highlighting certain aspects. She says an outsider fails to integrate the cultural aspects with the storyline "because his vision is always that of an outsider shifting his camera from one shot to other, never succeeding in entering into the silent spaces behind the colourful portraits" (34). These writers do not make any special efforts to highlight their culture. They have interiority and inwardness, and are natural in their writing. The cultural practices are described as the narratives progresses. Also, women in these narratives are not romanticized. There is no vivid description of their bodies to make these narratives sensual, but they are presented as members of society. They also show in their writing that even if the tribals choose another faith, they keep their indigenous traditions intact. These writers do not ridicule the tribals who embrace another faith, but leave it to the tribals to decide for themselves. These writers do not highlight certain limited aspects as a curious ethnographer does, but present their societies and cultures from the point of view of a person who is an integral part of the culture. Having gone through the experience of an average tribal, they are able to read the silent spaces and can portray their societies in an inimitably realistic manner.

In recent years the insider's point of view has been given preference. Clifford Geertz, a cultural anthropologist ponders on how best to describe native cultures from the outsiders' point of view and argues for a native point of view. The same thesis can be applied toTribal literature. David Rabkin rightly points out that "a writer from the outside will never see, however great his sympathetic powers, exactly as the artist who is part of that society will see"(32). The non-tribal writers' contribution and commitment in bringing tribal culture to the forefront is well recognized. However, the fact remains that they can only perceive tribal life and cannot experience it as a tribal writer can. So they will always be fellow travellers. One cannot be so sure about the authenticity of tribal narratives by outsiders. Indeed it is not so easy to examine even the authenticity of tribal writing. However, we must be thankful for what we do have. These writers have written about tribals as they find them or as they like to see them. It is for the reader to choose which kinds of story he/she prefers to like and some of those writers' insights are valuable. As a reader, I like to see tribals as they represent themselves so that I can get a more complete view. For centuries tribals have been represented by 'others.' It is time for them to speak for themselves. Since they are enlightened and capable of speaking for themselves, their efforts should be appreciated. Tribal literature is a literature of their own with a mission and a vision. Even if tribal representations reach us only through translations, we do get some benefit—the benefit of a comprehensive and complex picture, the sum total of what the Tribes of India are all about.

Appendix-I



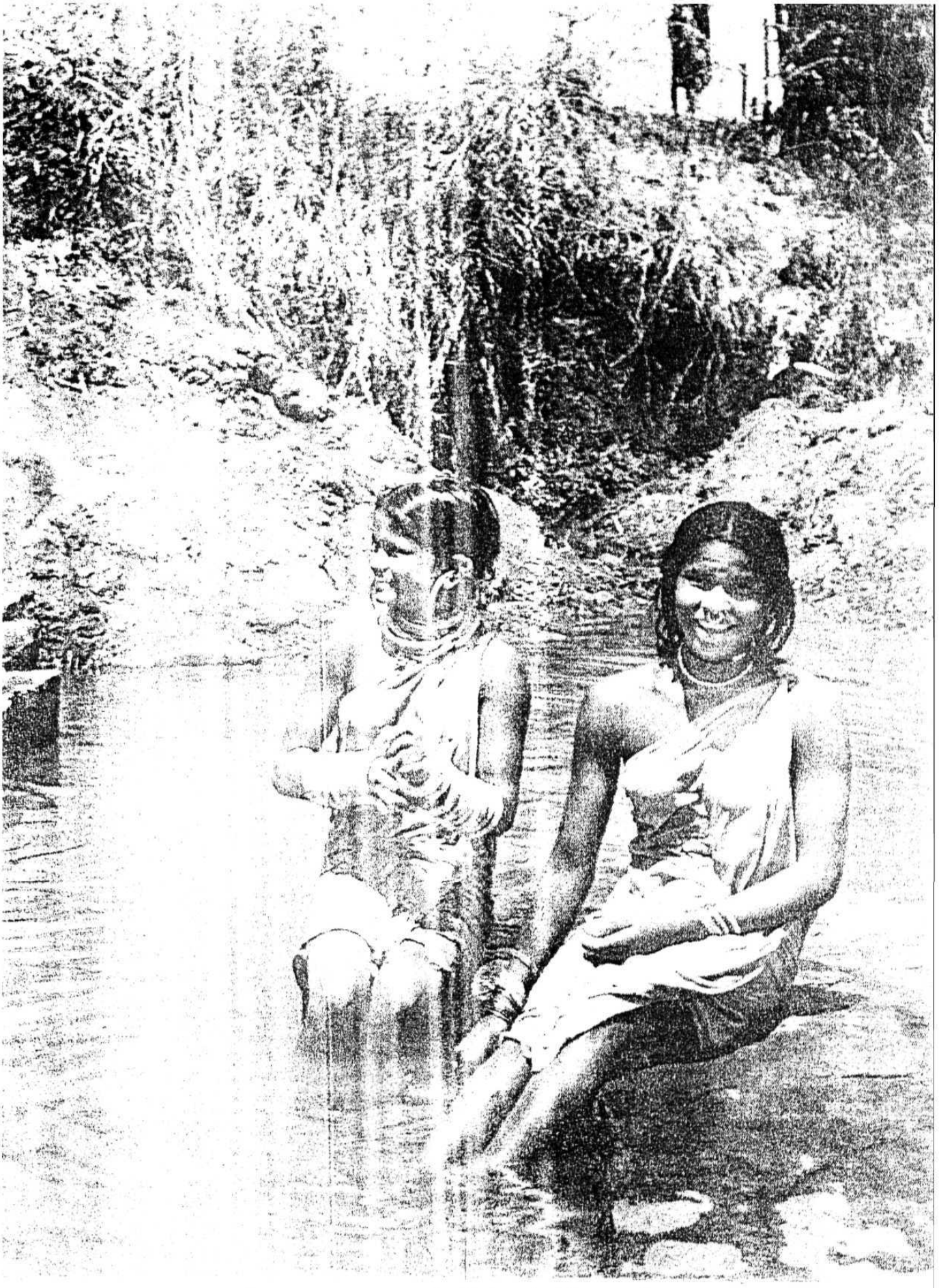
"Racial Divisions of Tribal Population"

From: Raza, Moonis. An Atlas of Tribal India (1990)

Appendix-II

"Tribal India: Community and Commonality"

From: Raza, Moonis. An Atlas of Tribal India (1990).



"The Exoticized Tribal Women"

From: Janah Sunil. The Tribals of India: Through the Lens of Sunil Janah (1993).

Appendix-IV

"The so-called Happy Go Lucky Tribal Girl"

From: Janah, Sunil. The Tribals of India: Through the Lens of Sunil Janah (1999

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