ETHNOGRAPHIC NARRATIVE: REPRESENTING THE TRIBAL IN THE SELECTED WORKS OF VERRIER ELWIN, GOPINATH MOHANTY, PRATIBHA RAY AND MAHASWETA DEVI

ABSTRACT

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of

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DECLARATION

I, Rualzakhumi Ralte, hereby declare that the contents of this thesis is the record of work done by me, and that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis for the award of any previous degree to me or, to the best of my knowledge, to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any university/institute.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following are the abbreviations of books that have been frequently used as per MLA Specifications:

PH	:	*Phulmat of the Hills: A Tale of the Gonds*
PJ	:	*Paraja*
TPL	:	*The Primal Land*
CMA	:	*Chotti Munda and His Arrow*
TWV	:	*The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin: An Autobiography*

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Ethnographic Narrative and Literature

> Anthropological fiction, or rather fictionalised anthropology (ethnography), is an established genre, of which Verrier Elwin has been a noted exponent in thiscountry.
>
> Bikram K. Das (*The Primal Land*: vii)

The ethnographic[1] novel as a literary genre serves as a useful device in representing a social group for a closer understanding of lived experiences within a culture. In requiring in-depth knowledge through thorough research on people represented, it is scientific on one hand while creative and sensitive in its fictionalisation of characters and narration on the other and therefore is interdisciplinary in its production and consummation. Changes in the manner of representing other cultures that are not one's own in ethnography, especially the novel form, has culminated from changes in world order, attitudes and concepts in literature and anthropology which is the major thrust of study undertaken in the first chapter.

During the course of the thesis four ethnographic novels that are representations [2] of the Tribal will be studied in detail. Homogenising the heterogeneous tribes of India may be unfair but as the tribes are subject[3] of study, the term Tribal has been used as a generic term representative of the marginalised tribals regardless of geographical locations and cultural moorings. All the four selected novels as ethnographic novels help us to understand the Tribal in his cultural context while dealing with certain issues that are important in understanding him, initiating readers to reflect on his behaviour and the actions he takes. All the four novels are written on certain groups of people classified as

'sheduled tribes' by the Indian Constitution. They are *Phulmat of the Hills: A Tale of the Gonds* (1937) by Verrier Elwin, *Paraja* (written in Oriya, 1945) by Gopinath Mohanty and translated by Bikram K. Das in 2001, *The Primal Land* (Oriya title is *Adibhumi,* 1993) by Pratibha Ray and translated by Bikram K. Das, 2001 and *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* (Bangla title is *Chotti Munda ebang Tar Tir*, 1980) by Mahasweta Devi and translated by Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak in 2002. Through the study of these four novels, the thesis aims to analyse the significance of the ethnographic novel and the effectiveness of its techniques in representing a people.

The thesis proposes to call these novels ethnographic novels by foregrounding the idea that genre[4] division gives us the ability "to recognize and interpret the code typical of a given genre" (Pyrhonen: 113). And according to Todorov, genres are born quite

> ...simply from other genres. A new genre is always the transformation of one or several old genres: by inversion, by displacement, by combination...it is a system in constant transformation
> (qtd by Pyrhonen: 113).

He believes that as social institutions they always have relationship with the dominant ideology of a given period. Jacques Derrida believes that "generic divisions and subdivisions do not simply arise from literature itself, but results from the designation of writers, critics, and theorists" (qtd by Pyrhonen: 114). This shows that a reading of a text cannot be confined only to its outward representation of words and sentences that form the linguistic representation, but the message it carries, the interpretation of meanings, of which change with re-readings in time and space[5]. Thus, a particular novel which has been classified in a certain period can be read as something else in another period, a reading of which can still be in constant motion with time. To cite examples, *Phulmat of the Hills* has been mentioned as a romantic novel, *Paraja* mentioned of as an individual's

struggle in Man's universal existence, *Chotti Munda and his Arrow* mentioned as a historical novel and *The Primal Land* as an anthropological novel. In the context of this thesis they will be studied as ethnographic novels.

Structuralism shows us that text and discourse have serious purposes and have multiple functions in production and consummation. One purpose that it serves may be the aesthetic, for literature is a representation of life and characters enliven a narrative. Another purpose may be its linguistic purposes and yet another is its way in producing social values, which have been initiated by social reality through literary as well as non-literary texts. Thus, interdisciplinarity and intertextuality becomes a norm in the "understanding of understandings"[6] (Geertz: 5) that intersect through relative disciplines. Apart from the aesthetic function that literature has, "texts also represent social values and traditions and relate to ideological positions...Texts encode these values and their inherent contradictions" (Peer: 15). Representation thus, is not just an outward phenomenon of words and rhetoric but have deeper layers of meanings concealed within texts and their contexts, just as deeper meanings are inscribed in the myriad of colours in photographs and paintings.

The very term 'representation' in its many uses may be a ground for arguments or discourses by the realist[7], the positivist[8] or the structuralist[9] in the context of the role of the intellectual in representing the masses. In the context of the thesis it indicates both representation as're-presentation' in art forms, for the novel will not cease to be an art form in its representation of life in varied ways. It also indicates representation, as 'speaking out for' which shows that as well as being an art form, the ethnographic novel being a representation of the life of certain groups of people, cannot remain a passive onlooker/outsider, for representation in literature cannot just be a composition of words

and sentences, but is valued today in its capability to create texts for discourses. The ethnographic novel while narrating a culture, enable voices to be heard from within a cultural context that had not been heard before. With the text in being valued more highly on the basis of its discursive elements, 'representation' has gained a far wider concept as it is applied today in "all areas that concern broad human perception, action and experience" (Rahman: 161) and is related to discourses in individual identity, power, language, hegemony, resistance, nationalism, ethnicity and indigenity.

Representing a group of people especially when the represented people are the marginalised does not mean it is to provoke the base into revolution to create another superstructure that would only duplicate the previous one. While Spivak provokes the intellectual to 'speak out for' the subaltern[10], she does not indicate that the base should be provoked into resurgence. In confronting the subaltern, Spivak means that the intellectual can re-examine himself, and represent himself. So, the use of the term representation here, aims to provoke readers into re-examining past conceptions and perceptions.

Modernism and Psychoanalysis has exposed us to the fact that a person can have more than one identity, that what we identify ourselves as may not be what others identify us to be and that identity cannot be upheld without the co-operation of others. In a world of historical and political changes, paradigm[11] shift in literature, the shifting interpretation of the narrative as text, the growing broader concept in representation in literary and non-literary works and the shifting understanding of ethnography itself, are the outcome of present literary theories, including Marxism[12], Post-colonialism and Cultural Studies that has penetrated into broader aspects of humanity, especially so, in socio-political systems and power related contexts. Post-Colonial theory in search of identity, Marxist literary theory and Cultural Studies paying attention to ideology and

social life, questions and inquiry into representations of cultures have become discourses of the day. For, questions on representation always bring forth questions on identity and alterity and as we represent each other in bewildering ways, one begins to understand the sensitivity of it. Today, discourses[13] on the use of the term representation begin to point out that representation of, or representing a people cannot always remain neutral and that representations made in the past of certain societies have led to false understanding of them, and that many such societies carry the burden till today. So, the task of representing others has become problematic, as the authority of the representing voice is open to contestations as to who speaks for whom? Why speak out? The thesis aims to study the selected novels and their representations of the Tribal, while bearing in mind the authority of the representing voice and the authenticity of his representation.

Contemporary literary theories such as Marxism, New Historicism, Post Structuralism, Post Colonialism and Post Modernism have played important roles in shaping the discipline we now understand as Cultural Studies. Cultural Studies began with the study of sub-cultures in the west. In rejecting humanism as the foundation to knowledge system, it questions the workings of power within socio-political systems. It questions why one set of individual is more privileged than the other and any such hierarchical notions. According to Heidegger, there cannot be a "wordless subject"[14] (qtd by Easthope: 185), it instigates the wordless subject to speak out and question its historical determined situation by the powers that had translated and textualised his culture without his say or consent, where as object of representation, he had remained a silent, silenced entity.

People cannot however remain silenced victims forever. They are vital, resilient, varied and contradictory and thus can be constant contestation to domination, and many

societies who had been mentioned as 'primitive', 'without history' are now reading representations of them and are in the process of correcting history. Thus, translating cultures and textualising them again bring forth questions of identity.

Post-colonial studies grew in strength after Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) argued that the definitions of the Occident and Orient have been fixed by 'Western Culture' over a period of centuries to represent and contain 'the non-European' as a difference 'between the familiar (Europe, the west, 'us') and the strange (the orient, the east, 'them'). Legitimising it as the norm, 'the west' constructs 'the orient' as its other, stretching away from it as 'the Middle East' and 'the Far East', an object to be known by the European subject as it cannot know itself. Post coloniality in this context becomes questions of representations made on a society with the concept of the 'other' as in empirical rhetorics.

The concept of the 'other' described by Antony Easthope is

> ...a diffuse, flexible, a relatively 'deep' term able to gain analytic purchase in parts of texts that the more traditional accounts of ideology and gender cannot reach. It may most easily be defined as structure rather than content. (33)

That it is a relationship in which a first term privileges itself by denigrating a second term as outside, of which the main source is psychoanalysis where the unconscious 'I' becomes possible only because the 'it' remains it's repressed other. A second sense of the 'other' is Derridian. This has aimed to expose and deconstruct oppositions operating at a deep level in the structuring matrix of Western discursive tradition. These and other influences have further exploded the myth of the concept 'other' which has become a prominent term used after Post Colonial studies. The Tribal as the 'other' in the context of Indian literature will be discussed in the next chapter.

The broader concept of the narrative is by and large the influence of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism that has broken the traditional interpretation of narrative as well as representation. Traditionally narrative involves a 'story' and 'discourse'. Gerard Genette had described the narrative as "the representation of an event or of a sequence of events" (127). H. Porter Abbott had described it as "the representation of events, consisting of *story* and *narrative discourse"* (16). Thus, definitions such as these tell us that when one uses the term narrative, it refers to a story and discourse. The story here is the basic sequence of events, while narrative is the representation in linguistic formation. Even as E. M. Foster showed the difference between narrative from 'story' or 'plot', present semioticians, linguists, philosophers have all collectively pointed out that the narrative perceived as a simple act of storytelling is far more complex, as they help us to see the various levels of discourse present in a narrative.

Narrative now in its contemporary context is no longer just a simple act of the production and reception of storytelling in linguistic formation. For the story is found to reveal deeper layers of meanings within the outward manifestations but that representations in a story can give way to discourses. Narrative then becomes more complex as texts begin to have sub-texts which with re-readings of a text can even pose as louder voices, or even hyper-texts that can lead to open ended debates of a text. The reader may find himself in a far more challenging venture to what had begun in a simple intention of reading or listening to a text while the more serious reader's response can even reduce the freedom and autonomy of the authority of the writer.

For Edward E. Bruner:

> ...narrative structures organize and give meaning to experience, but there are always feelings and lived experience not fully encompassed by the dominant story (131).

He goes further by saying that "social contradictions and the realities of material determination are silently inscribed within the text, and the task of the critic is to expose" (ibid).

According to Barthes, narrative "is present in every age, in every place, in every society...it is simply there like life itself", and that it is "international, transhistorical, transcultural" (65). Thus it can be said that narratives - oral, visual, or text bound being as ancient as human existence, belongs to the world, and the world is full of narrative. Songs, folk tales, myths and legends that have been narrated in pre-literate cultures become powerful social texts as the history and culture of a people and their collective thinking can be read through these narrations. The need is to document such knowledge in some form or the other, for even though environment changes with time and cultures mingle and go through change, hybridise or disappear wholly, narratives of a people and their culture that has been documented in one form or the other and preserved in memory will always claim spaces in time, of a time, to mediate across time, as past will negotiate with the present in and through time and space, for a closer understanding of people and the reason they take certain actions. For,

> Narratives unfold in time, and the past and present, and the future of a given event of action affects our interpretation of that action (Bridgeman: 52).

It is ethnographic poetics[15] that tries to establish culturally authentic ways to read indigenous oral narratives as literary forms. Studies that were made by the formalists interpret the oral narrative as a commentary which supplements the text. According to Marcus and Fischer,

> Such literatures offer not only expression of indigenous experience, unavailable in any other form, but also constitute, as similar literatures do in our own society, indigenous commentaries as a form of autoethnography that in particular concerns itself with the representation of experience. (74).

The ethnographic novel pays attention to these social texts, as stories that we narrate are said to be a collective wisdom about social cultural behaviours of people that we encounter in certain environmental situation. It is this act of human experience, natural to all human society down the ages that has gained further curiosity, especially so in our structural, post-structural world where it has awakened greater scholarly investigations, not only in the field of literature, but in dispersed disciplines where the concern is Man, society and culture. Often the anthropologist or the novelist while studying about a people, in order to find clues of their past, especially so in pre-literate cultures, try to find clues from their oral traditions for they tend to be powerful social texts. These social texts can be parallel to written documented historical texts, but often they contest it, as myths relayed through stories do have significance in people's understanding of life and behaviour.

Cultural anthropologists[16] believe that a myth begins in an oral narrative and is taken over by the literate culture which succeeds it. In the oral culture, the poet who is the transmitter of myths is also the teacher. His role in the society is significant as someone who knows and remembers the ancient formula of knowledge. With scientific progress and the achievement of the written communications with progressive cultures, the oral culture has come under threat. The oral tradition which was relatively stable in the living conditions and way of life of a community is disrupted by the literate culture which brings in new belief, moral values, new attitudes, new technological skills and new

ideology. In the context of India, communities that have been taken over from non-literate to literate especially after colonialism, where education is given in languages that are not the society's own, the oral traditions of such people are found to be undergoing threats. G. N. Devy, while compiling tribal literatures writes thus:

> ...I for one, can no longer think of literature as something written. Of course, I do not dispute the claim of written compositions and texts to the status of literature; but surely it is time we realize that unless we modify the established notion of literature as something written, we will silently witness the decline of various Indian oral traditions. That literature is a lot more than writing is a reminder necessary for our times. (xiii)

Ever since Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretation of Culture* (1973) transformed the Balinese cock-fight into a social text, one can understand how cultural items like stone inscriptions, rituals, dance and performances, feasts, festivals, photographs all document and narrate stories. Mark Currie further says that narrative comprehended in its plurality is seen as a "mode of thinking and being that is not confined to literature" (6). So, narrative that had been conceived as almost a similar term to story becomes a far wider concept in our present times.

Still further, in the past decade with 'the narrative turn in humanities', narrative is perceived everywhere in every field, in politics, science, law, medicine and so on. Narrative has become a similar term to 'explanation' or 'argument' as one now prefers to use the word 'narrative' instead of 'theory', 'hypothesis' or 'evidence'. Narrative in such context has become one principal way we perceive the world.

The concept of 'discourse' too, now no longer remain just the simple relationship between the writer and reader or teller and listener, of the outward representation of a story, but as a certain point that can be brought forth as a debate or discussion. Michel

Foucault defines discourse as the institutionalised social limitations determining what can be said on a particular context. He defines it as such:

> Discoursive practices are characterised by the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of the norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories. (199)

As post-coloniality inclines towards the importance of discourse analysis and textuality, in which the literary text is seen as only one kind of a larger whole, our senses awaken to the importance of re-reading and re-thinking over fictional accounts that have been narrated and transformed into texts. That fictional accounts are not only collective wisdom but that narrative especially in its textualised formation, is an important discursive element that can have several meanings in a context. For, deconstructive reading while questioning all sets of norms and beliefs that have been taken for granted, prompts us to re-think back from different angles and points of view.

So as we incline ourselves to the study and interpretation of society and culture, and accept that narrative is not confined to literature alone, we open our perspective across inter-disciplinary boundaries for a closer understanding of the narrative, and in this context ethnography where the object and concern is representation of Man, society and culture. As Said has pointed out,

> ...texts have ways of existing that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society – in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly. (35)

As our perspective gain wider fields and come to the point of ethnography and the prose fiction, we reflect on the point that in our contemporary world of cross-cultural exchanges and inter-disciplinary methods that we speak of, we can no longer

ignore the alliance between ethnography and fiction. For, in both ethnography and fiction is "the production and interpretation of narrative" (Blyn: 239).

The word ethnography deriving from two Greek words, *ethnos* meaning folk/people and *graphos* meaning to write indicate that in its historical context ethnography is an act of writing which involves writing about people. The nineteenth century saw ethnography grow as a serious form of writing under the umbrella of anthropology which is a scientific study of mankind. Ethnography as a child or subset of anthropology also had the scientific sanction. According to Stephen A. Tyler,

> "...while '*ethos'* implies ethical, the suffix '*graphy'* is a reminder of the fact that ethnography itself is contextualised by technology of written communication (122).

In its scientific mode it is described as:

> That field of anthropological research based on direct observation of and reporting on a people's way of life. It is the basic methodology employed by cultural anthropologists and consists of two stages fieldwork, which is the term used for the process of observing and recording data: and reportage, the production of description and analysis of the under study. (Ascroft et al: 85)

In principle anthropology's aim is to show equal interest in all societies but modern anthropology emerged with colonialism wherein the practice of studying people and cultures concentrated on 'primitive' or pre-literate societies, who were apparently 'discovered' by the west.

For the colonisers with their humanistic thoughts and enlightening mission, ethnography became a useful discipline wherein cultures of their contacts could be constructed through the notion of the exotic – in their difference from the west, geographically as well as culturally. Early modern anthropologists and social scientists

that set out in their mission to study peoples were influenced by philosophers of their time. Thomas Hobbes saw the difference between cultural difference and cultural history and he believed that human society as a natural phenomenon behaved in accordance with certain principles that can be observed empirically. David Hume believed that experience is the only reliable source of valid knowledge. There was also the influence of the Darwinian theory that the stages of human development to civilisation is a long journey from savagery and civilisation being viewed as materialistic development and literacy, the cultures that were 'discovered' by the west were regarded as 'primitive' needing to be civilised to the standards of the west. It is a historical fact that through their discourses the west had endlessly reconfirmed its own cultural identity by finding for itself its supposed 'other' as a way of affirming with pride what they were not and in this way maintaining their own social and cultural hierarchy. For administrative purposes it was a way of 'knowing' their subjects of colonialism.

With colonialism ethnography had become a good past time even for persons who were not trained in the field. Like the missionaries, administrative officers and military men, and those who passed by like traders and explorers – all gave accounts of their exploration and expansion in various fields. The accounts of the so called "men on the spot" (James Frazer qtd. by Cifford: 26) who stayed with the people they represented and shared their lives without any apparent political agenda attached to their representation were however considered to be more authentic than the representations of the administrator or the missionary who had ulterior motives behind their representations. With the discipline becoming more relevant for colonial purposes, the

accounts of the 'men on the spot' were replaced by fieldworker theorists who were trained for the purpose in universities.

Ethnographies were then read mainly for "amusement, curiosity, or moral broadening, plus, in colonial situations, for administrative convenience" (Geertz: 5). At times they were elaborated to feed the hungry audience back home. Again these accounts had to undergo governmental approval to be published and often an ethnographer found himself helpless to powers beyond himself even when he wanted to reveal his own truthful accounts, for the glory of colonialism had to be maintained. Colonial ethnography having the scientific validity as an authoritative voice was the exact location of colonial discourses. It was also parallel history to dominant history – dominant history created by the colonisers.

Thus, domination is not just physical domination; it is also the power to write, to document and to represent societies and cultures. Since cultural contact between the coloniser and the colonised was usually a contact between a written culture and oral cultures, the written culture usually emerged as more powerful than the oral culture.

It is through the ambit of Cultural Studies, where even office files and administrative writings are deemed as texts for discourses that colonial ethnography and its representations could be penetrated and analysed by literary interpretations so that these discourses could be brought forth as texts for discourses in the field of literature. In the ambit of Post-Colonial discourses it was mainly the outcome of Edward Said's outpourings particularly in *Orientalism* (1978), wherein he classified traditional anthropology with Orientalism and criticised the language and rhetoric applied in ethnography and the strategies used in writing about other cultures, especially imperialistic political structures. Thus, colonial ethnography with its imperialistic and

authoritative representations began to be subjected to many debates as to its status as cultural critique[17] during the nineteen eighties. Said argued that:

> ...colonialism created non-mutual and hierarchical relations in which the colonizer was always and inescapably the self to the marginalized other of the colonized. By "knowing" the other the colonizer asserted his right to determine what that other could or should be. In other word, the colonized could be literally moulded into whatever best served the economic and political purposes of the colonizer. (Griffiths: 165)

In such scenario ethnography as a discipline that is enmeshed in writing about peoples and cultures and their way of life, remained for sometime a neglected area in the field of Cultural Studies for its supposed imperialistic and authoritative design. Now, in the light of changing world order, attitudes and thoughts, ethnography today, "given the hyperfluidity of information and consequent reconfiguration of settled disciplines" (Marcus: xx) and

> ...in the context of media-oriented cultural studies, ethnography has become a code-word for a range of qualitative methods, including participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus groups. (Barker: 32)

Auto-ethnography too, a term first used by Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes* (Blyn: 259) to indicate ethnography from the point of view of the native, is also appropriated to other things. It is now understood as an autobiographical narrative which is highly personalised by means of which the author helps extend understanding of a discipline or a culture.

For Marcus and Fischer,

> As...ethnography moves more towards literatures, dialogues, and media of self-expression produced by subjects, it fulfils in practice the idea of relativism[18], which unfortunately hardened into a doctrine . (167)

Ethnography that had merely been descriptive and "a potentially controversial and unsettling mode of representation" (ibid) is undergoing changes. Today, differences in the world is no longer

> ...discovered, as in the age of exploration, or salvaged, as in the age of colonialism and high capitalism, but rather must be redeemed, or recovered as valid and significant, in an age of apparent homogenization and suspicion of authenticity. (ibid)

Thus, ethnography is now entering a period which recent anthropologists call as, "experimentations with genres and modes of writing" (Marcus and Fischer: xx) in representing subjects of ethnography through different genres, applying modes of dialogism and polyphony initiated by recent literary theories in the varied ways in which people can be represented in several art forms. With literary theories to help, ethnography has gone through changes in turning its attention to social groups that are closer to the ethnographer. Today, the very word ethnography is almost synonymous with qualitative inquiry, and is appropriated to different disciplines.

Global conditions, political as well as economic inequality has led to large scale migration especially to the west. This has led to the post-modern condition where different cultures including the diaspora, the sub-culture, the feminist, the queer, have to live and mingle with each other in the same social space wrought with multiculturalism, and as one and all clamour to be heard and seen, the modern day ethnographer now finds a vast array of fields to work on even in his own home ground without having to travel far and wide to discover some primitive society.

Changes in attitude in the nature of ethnography interestingly culminated from literature and literary criticism. It is the importance of literary awareness of anthropological rhetoric that has influenced anthropological thinkers like Clifford Geertz,

James Clifford, George Marcus and others to shape the characterisation and interpretation of the present trends in ethnographic writings. For in a fast globalising world where cultures contact and influence one another and societies are moving toward a somewhat common historical process and "In an attempt to understand understandings not our own" (Geertz: 5) ethnography is no longer the simple discovery of new worlds, and the translation of the exotic. "It is increasingly the discoveries of worlds that are familiar" (Marcus: xvii) but not fully understood by all. Added to this, in a radically changing world order, where the very term 'culture' which had been for the humanists a synonymous term with elitism and exclusivity, is now regarded (besides many other explanations) as simply "a whole way of life" (Williams: 320), or according to Edward Sapir, as "assemblage of practices and beliefs that determine the texture of our lives" (qtd by Christopher: 14).

The fact that the discipline of ethnography has become sensitive to literary theories is indeed proof that disciplines are slowly interpenetrating into each other's terrain. Clifford points out that Roodney Needham in an essay had even suggested that anthropology be disintegrated and distributed to neighbouring disciplines (5). True to his comment several initiatives are now underway to share and exchange perspectives across other boundaries in different disciplines. It is also important to reflect that such initiative clearly show that the reading of a text should not be confined to the text itself alone, but in its contextual relevance and to perceive its importance to other related disciplines, for the text then achieves plurality of meanings.

Like narratives that are written/told and read/listened, in recent years ethnography as a semi literary genre, as a story telling and as discourse element is being discussed by both literary thinkers and contemporary anthropologists alike. They have turned their

attention to the nature of the poetics and politics of ethnography and their representations. Cultural anthropologists in particular are now voicing their proposal in comparing ethnography with fiction. They see ethnography as

> ...an emergent interdisciplinary phenomenon. Its authority and rhetoric have spread to many fields where 'culture' is a newly problematic object of description and critique. (Cifford: 3)

According to Clifford Geertz, ethnographic writings either as interpretation or explanation of a culture consists of fictions in the sense of "something made or fashioned...also of making up, of inventing things real" (15). Both ethnography and fiction are activities that involve writing and creating texts and representing people, lives and actions. The ethnographer like the fiction writer stays for sometime on location, making notes and gathering information which he later transforms into text, recounting from memory. So, for Geertz ethnography is a made out fiction based on facts and that in the case of ethnography, it is a 'thought experience', while in fiction the author without any constraint can let his imagination freely flow.

For Edward M. Bruner, "ethnographies are guided by an implicit narrative structure, by a story we tell about peoples we study". He wishes "to extend this notion to ethnography as discourse, as a genre of storytelling" (131). For, like a story which has a beginning, a middle and end, cultures also change taking the form of the past, a present and a future. Every telling of a culture changes since culture is dynamic and do not remain the same. The ethnographer's predicament is that he has only the present situation in hand and has to construct the past in some way or the other and then anticipate the future. The process is more or less like fiction writing.

James Clifford in taking his cue from Victor Turner's essay on narrative which points out that social performance enacts powerful stories, writes in his essay "On Ethnographic Allegory", that he would treat ethnography itself as performance emplotted by powerful stories for "ethnographic writing is allegorical at the level both of its content (what it says about a culture and their histories) and of its form (what is implied by its mode of textualization" (Clifford: 98). Viewed from this perspective, the Bible according to him is the first ethnography.

While Derrida makes us aware that truth claimed is often open-ended, he has destabilised the notion of the ethnographer who had been viewed as the grand authority the purveyor of truth. So according to James Clifford, even collected oral narratives will depend on a particular narrator's or informant's personal knowledge and memory and in a documented textual version the author's own interpretation which he calls the "partiality of truth" (22). Thus, for the ethnographer "there is no longer any place of over view (mountaintop) from which to map human ways of life" (Clifford: 22) and one can no longer claim the whole truth, for truth claimed is often open-ended.

While disintegrating the boundary between that of anthropology and literature, between science and arts, one can reflect on the fact that they had always had close affinity to each other. Firstly, both discipline that of ethnography and literature have always been enmeshed in written technology, both reflecting life and helping us to understand what it is to be a human. Secondly, myths, rituals, oral narratives belonging to the realm of anthropology have time and again played important roles in many a creative writer's work down the ages. For, anthropologists had always taken interest in the production of fiction, literature and oral narratives of the third world for not only are they

> ...guides for their inquiries in the field, but also suggesting ways in which the form of ethnography might be altered to reflect the kind of cultural experiences that find expression both in indigenous writing and in the ethnographer's fieldwork. (Marcus and Fischer: 74).

Thirdly, literature which had once been valued for its 'higher sensibilities', the power of human 'imagination' and appreciation for personal geniuses of writers, had always laid stress on language and rhetoric. Ethnography, like literature which is always enmeshed in writing about peoples and cultures had also always laid stress on the particular style of the ethnographer – his rhetoric and design.

Fourthly, literature which had been elitist and exclusivist had chosen particular texts through canon formations, to determine what is 'cultured' which also brought a relative idea to the field of anthropology and its child ethnography, as to which race is more 'cultured' to other races, wherein the 'other' races were termed 'savages' needing to be civilised and educated, to the so called 'cultured' standard of living or quality of life.

As the 'grand' style and its authoritative voice came to be contested, with dialogism and polyphony becoming popular modes of textual production, ethnography too began to change its modes of expression. And today both ethnography and literature as written communication may further be threatened with the hyperfluidity of media expression.

Novel writing, the latest born of the established genres in literature has become today the widest form of literary expression for its ability to accommodate different voices that clamour to be heard. Pin pointing novel writing to a particular genre too seem to become more complex, since it has become a fusion of genres in the cross – 'understanding of understandings' which is not fixed to one context but to several,

leading to inter-disciplinary activities. As for example, reading a detective novel or a science fiction compels us to feel the need to explore wider fields of knowledge. So the reading of the ethnographic novel entails us to explore its relevance in the historical, socio-political context of the people represented.

As different communities and individuals within communities call for wider spaces in the literary arena; to accommodate these many voices at large, literature is still in the process of trying to find spaces and even sharing ideas with other disciplines, for the literary critic of today is broadening his horizon on different topics which were not once deemed as literary. As the ethnographic and the fictional narrative have undergone different theoretical speculations through the process of time, experimental moments have merged the two different modes of narrative production. It is thus that the scientific mode of narrative production has merged with the sensitive mode in order to represent a people. What is being highlighted here is that the ethnographic fiction especially in its novel form has emerged as an interesting and important tool for representing people, their lives and ways of understanding it. For ethnography that entails an in-depth study of a people and their culture can find expression in the fictional formation to express ethnographic objects of study with more personal accounts, thus changing the scientific objectives of study to the subjective by creating characters from fieldwork study, that enliven the fictional narrative. Unlike the psychological novel that delves into deep consciousness of a character, the ethnographic novel is populated by characters that are found in daily lives anywhere.

Thus it is not surprising that an ethnographer should resort to the fictional narrative, especially the novel form for textual production in a bid to representing his subjects of study or for that matter why a novelist should try to take up the mantle of a

self made ethnographer, a fieldworker theorist, or even take up the burden of authority, to highlight points, and why certain writers wish to be both ethnographer and a novelist.

The difference between the ethnographer and the novelist is that the "novelist will typically focus our attention on an individual, their struggles and motivations" whereas the ethnographer "will extract key elements and use them to understand and generalise social aspects of seemingly individual capacities and motivations" (Blasco: 59). Thus, the ethnographer and the novelist seem to have contradictory motivations, and

> As the teleological perspective in fictional narratives and ethnographic account is different, the narrative formation runs the risk of blurring authorial identity where an ethnographer writes fiction or the novelist attempts to offer ethnographic account. (Baral: 10)

In spite of these facts, both motivations have merged together to bring about a genre that is of its own. Roland Barthes had been quoted by Clifford as saying that:

> Interdisciplinary work, so much discussed these days, is not about confronting already constituted disciplines (none of which, in fact, is willing to let itself go). To do something interdisciplinary it's not enough to choose a "subject" (a Theme) and gather round it two or three sciences. Interdisciplinarity consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one (qtd. by Clifford: 1)

So, the point here is that the ethnographic novel should be regarded as a genre of its own, no matter its source and history, but as having close affinity in form and content to its parents that of ethnography and the novel but having its own characteristics. The ethnographic scientific validity that calls for authenticity and realism should be maintained, even while being imaginative, sensitive and creative.

A question that is posed here is why ethnographic narrative in its fictionalised formation should be more tempting rather than other ethnographic narrative forms, such

as the monogram, the dairy, the essay, the autobiography or other forms of representation?

Perhaps other forms of narrating, other than the fictionalised one, are too rigorous, impersonal and scientific for the writer who wishes to relate to his readers more personal accounts of his subjects of representation. One reason perhaps may be that of the storytelling and listening process which is an innate human "primeval curiosity" (Foster: 41) that has a certain charm in itself. And as the main backbone of the novel is about storytelling, it becomes a useful tool to mediate between the author and reader in a special kind of way, and as "the novelist is himself a human being; there is an affinity between him and his subject-matter which is absent in many other forms" (ibid: 56). For, it is through the fictionalised narrative mode that we really come to understand people or characters inside out, remember them and sympathise with their experiences and environmental situations.

> The use of fiction or fictive devices within the ethnographic genre itself is another matter. In experimental works that focus on the representation of experience and describe encounters between fieldworker and specific others, delving into the lives of particular individuals and assuming multiple perspectives, or voices, become attractive textual strategies. (Marcus and Fischer: 75)

It is also said that while fictionalising a character, whether fictions based on facts or wholly of imagination, the affinity of the writer with his fictional character is that he discreetly feels and see a part of himself while creating his fictional characters, and that makes it easier to speak and act his thoughts through his characters.

The writer's emotions reflected through his characters can be better defined in a fictionalised version, which cannot be done so in a factual and scientific account. The author also finds that he can voice his representation through the actions and voices of his

characters while maintaining the anonymity of the personal identity of his characters who are usually his informants during fieldwork, while incorporating them in a fictionalised mode of narrative production. In-depth descriptions of places, locations and architectural spaces with imaginative insight can find more space in a fictionalised account than a scientific mode of narrative production which calls for precision.Objects that have spiritual or aesthetic sense for a people can be defined with sensitivity in the novel form. Further still, for a very practical reason which a few anthropologists have admitted, is the fact that it is easier to approach publishers with a piece of novel rather than other ethnographic narrative mode of production, for publication.

In the twenty first century, few voices have come up to refute the idea of appropriating ethnography with fiction. Robin Blyn writing in her essay "Mama Day and the Spectre of Relativism" (2002) says that "as Clifford positions ethnography as a fiction, a partial truth... he writes himself into a corner" (241). Paloma Gay y Blasco and Huon Wardle in their book *How to Read Ethnography* (2007) object to Clifford calling ethnography a creative 'lie'. They argue and defend ethnographers and are apprehensive of challenges to their authority to represent cultures. They want to maintain ethnography as a scientific truth. It is true that one should not brush aside these concerns, for too easy appropriations made in dismantling ethnography's originality can disintegrate the discipline in bewildering ways. However, the point of ethnographic novel as a genre of its own is what remains in this context. While study proceeds on this genre of novel writing, the need is to formulate standard characteristics.

As the genre is interdisciplinary in character, both parent disciplines - ethnography and the novel form should be respected. The conclusion drawn here is that one should maintain the certain norms of traditional ethnography. It should be so that one

should respect concerns and see to the fact that the author himself and his text are authoritative enough to represent a people. Subjects of representation and their location should be clear and well defined, and not of some imaginary mappings of locations and of imaginary cultures. For, the diaspora in his nostalgia or longing for a homeland often creates imaginary homelands, people and cultures which cannot be accepted as a fieldwork experience.

One may see to the fact that the author has done sufficient fieldwork on location and is competent enough to take up the mantle of authority and knowledge in representing his subject of study and is able enough to speak out for the people he is representing. For, in an ethnographical novel where multiple voices are heard, the authorial presence will always be felt for the fieldworker will invariably reveal his own perspective, participation, voice, and his emotional experiences through his characters and their actions which are inevitable. He may even voice political concerns and take steps to intervene on their behalf.

Even as postcolonial India remains a multilingual and multicultural space(s), colonialism has left behind their language and so English remains the largest means of communication as far as language is concerned. Adopting the novel as a literary genre in India is also a colonial influence. During colonial and early post-colonial India, very few Indian authors could find a niche for themselves in the Indian English literary scene for different reasons, despite the fact that texts written in the English language had a wider scope for national and international readership to represent the heterogeneous social groups that prevail in the country.

It was also a fact that Indian literature in English had to a large extent been the privilege of the upper class and educated elite who could read and understand the English language. According to the Subaltern historian, Ranajit Guha, the

> Colonialist elitism and bourgeois-national elitism...survived the transfer of power and been assimilated to neo-colonialist, imitated colonialism in politics and literature. (Guha: 1)

The representations of these literary canons were being mostly read by the reading public who mainly consisted of the educated privileged class and one has to be reminded that the anti-colonial movement did not represent or encompass all the peoples of the country. As post-colonial India created its own centre – that of the educated elite, Indian literature in English went ahead to represent a small section of people in the country, thus proving that

> 'Colonialism' is not just something that happens from outside a country or a people, not just something that operates with the collusion of forces from inside, but a version of it can be duplicated from within. So that 'post colonialists', far from being a term that can be indiscriminately applied, appears to be riddled with contradictions and qualifications. (Loomba: 12)

For the people who continue to remain on the periphery or those that are at the bottom of the economic margin – the 'subaltern', for them there is no post about their colonialism. Their voices continue to remain unheard and are marginally represented in the political scene as well as in the literary arena.

Bruner says that the ethnographer's predicament is that all he has is the present, the contemporary scene, and it is that by some means or the other he has to situate the present in a time sequence, that of the past, the present and anticipate the future. The ethnographic novels that are selected for the thesis find clues of the past of the people

they represent through their oral traditions in their folklores, myths, legends, songs and dances which are to be taken as social texts. For the people who have not yet acquired scripts these social texts act as memory and it is through memory that they create their own historical narratives, which many times contest the master narratives of dominant cultures. When the ethnographer documents these oral narratives we see glimpses of spatial times, in our time, and understand more of what used to be a life lived in the past.

It is usually the concerned and sympathetic ethnographer or the novelist who takes up the mantle of the one concerned for the disappearance of a certain way of life to voice a representation of such a life becomes many a times a resistance, motivated either out of anger, sympathy or just a rational observation. As the writer of the ethnographic novel mediates between his subject of representation and his readers/audiences he cannot always be neutral and especially so when his project is a personal one. The ethnographic novelist cannot fully predict the future of these tribes but he anticipates it through the thoughts and actions of his characters. It is through the ethnographic novel that we come to understand and place a people's long historical heritage and culture and situate it in present socio-political systems helping us to understand why certain people chose certain actions to maintain a stand. Helping us to anticipate their future through the actions they make.

Representations made through the ethnographic novel can also benefit the social and political scientists, for the ethnographic novel form adheres to the use of realism. It also proves that history, ethnography and literature are congruent and not separate. The thesis in studies into tribal representations also affirm that literature cannot ignore or neglect the subaltern whose voices are less heard and less represented in history, politics and literature. It refutes the literary thinkers who believe that subaltern studies should be

confined to the social sciences and not in literature, for life in its many contradictions is represented in the novel.

Homogenising the heterogeneous tribes of India may seem to be unfair, but for the present it is a fact that texts are still very limited to represent all the tribal groups in India. The reason for such limitations in the representations of the tribes of India may be due to the fact that many tribes still do not have the privilege of better education while many have not acquired scripts to represent themselves and are still depending on oral narratives in songs, dances and performances, which are slowly being translated and textualised. Applying the term 'Tribal' itself can pose open ended debates, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

In a multicultural, multilingual country like India, instead of homogenising the variety of literatures the country is rich in; it will be more interesting and enriching to make cross-cultural exchanges and representations. In recent years activities in translating regional texts into English has created growing concern in that it disintegrates the authenticity of the original text and that the authority of the text is also being contested. In the context of this research such translations are found to enable readers and scholars to the 'understanding of understandings' which are not of one's own. For translating a text is not just a method of translating from one language to another, rather, the translator translates a culture as well. This can be further enriched when regional works are translated into English which continue to remain the widest language of communication in the country. The growing translated works of regional literatures into English are now termed as 'new literature' when in fact they are not all new, but new in the sense that translation has opened them up for a wider public, especially for those who cannot understand or read them in the original language.

In a scene of inter-disciplinarity and cross-cultural exchanges reading regional literatures in translations bring out important issues of relocation, identity, history, nation and language. The broad spectrum of post-colonial discourse may not define a specific or particular location and it is through the emergence of this so called new literature that we can locate specific locations in postcolonial India. The term 'representation' has gained a multi-dimensional mode of thinking, and till of late it is related to discourses in individual identity, power, language, hegemony, resistance, nationalism, ethnicity and indigenity and it is the act of translation that has brought a new and wider dimension to representation.

It is true that the regional writers can express deeper emotions and attitudes of local people they represent in that they live closer to them and understand the language they use. Translating regional works into English brings out texts for a wider reading public, as we begin to understand many things we had not been aware of due to distance and communication. When language is a barrier in understanding each other we can only imagine about each other which can become more real to us when we can read representations of each other, which can be done through translation.

As one reflects upon Spivak's idea that the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representing the "silent, silenced centre" (27) that cannot yet speak and know their conditions, the intellectual's role is to try to know their conditions and understand and represent them till they can speak out on their own. The point in this context is to bring out selected texts that are authentic representations of the Tribal that speak out for him. These texts are representations of different tribes from different parts of the country and are all ethnographic fictionalised works in the form of the novel. Each novel is considered as an representation because their authors had lived for sometime on location

and taken up the mantle of fieldworker theorist, thus knowing and understanding the Tribal through firsthand knowledge rather than through secondary sources. All the novels, excepting *Phulmat of the Hills: A Tale of the Gonds* by Verrier Elwin, has been written in English. The other three novels have been written in regional languages later translated into English for a wider reading public.

Phulmat of the Hills: A Tale of the Gonds (1937) written by Verrier Elwin is considered to be the first ethnographic novel in Indian soil. Bikram K. Das stated in the introduction to Pratibha Ray's novel *Primal Land,* that it was Verrier Elwin who was the first to established ethnographic fiction writing in India. Though less read and very little known in India, the novel is considered to be relevant for study. Elwin who was English by birth came to India and spent the rest of his life with the tribes of Central and Northeast India, married into the tribal community and became an Indian by choice. His works as anthropologist is numerous though he had no such formal training in the field. Only two of his novels got published. They are *Phulmat of the Hills: A Tale of the Gond* (1937) and *A Cloud that's Dragonish* (1938). *Phulmat of the Hills* in representing the Gond tribe gives detailed ethnographic accounts of the Gonds, their mythical tales, importance of family genealogies, totem identity, black magic and internal tribal-clan conflicts. Elwin had written this novel probably aiming to dislodge the prevailing notions of the Tribal by the general public that had largely been influenced by colonial ethnography. For readership he aimed for the English reading public and he himself admits to his readers that the novel is 'coarse and realistic'.

Paraja (1945), written by Gopinath Mohanty was translated into English by Bikram K. Das in1987. The novel is a moving story about the Paraja tribe of Orissa with detailed ethnographic accounts of their life and travails encountered by them. Gopinath

Mohanty in his capacity as a civil servant was posted for sometime in the district of Koraput where he lived in close contact with the tribes who inhabited the area, thus had access to their way of life and saw their struggles firsthand. He creates distinct characters that portray the Tribal and the outsider. His Tribal world is an idealised space in a remote area of India that is slowly being infiltrated by outside forces that exploit the Tribal's innocent mind, only to finally destroy him. Through the unravelling of the narrative it is clear on whose side the novelist's sympathy lies, though as administrative personnel his perception is realistic. The novel is a regional work written in Oriya and the translator makes it a point to emphasise that no translation can come as close to the original.

The Primal Land (Oriya title is *Adibhumi*,1993), is written in Oriya by Pratibha Ray and translated into English by Bikram K. Das in 2001. It is a fictionalised reconstruction of the Bondo tribe of Orissa, who live in the remote mountains and forests of Malkangiri, which used to be under Koraput district. Ray's novel exposes us to the Bonda way of understanding life. Colonial administration has recorded the Bonda tribe as 'criminal', for the Bonda man is feared for his bow and arrow and his understanding of life that killing is not a crime. Ray's representation helps us to understand why the Bonda acts in the way he does. She has reconstructed their past through their legends and stories, and her anticipation of their future is one of extinction of their culture. She spent time in the Bonda country during a research project she had undertaken and done extensive fieldwork, thus rendering her work to be as close to the authentic as possible. Through her novel we come to learn about the the subaltern subject in a post-independence India wherein Neo-colonialism in the name of development and progress, threatens to bring about the cultural extinction of the Bondas.

Chotti Munda and His Arrow (Bangla title is *Chotti Munda ebang Tar Tir,* 1980) by Mahasweta Devi which was translated into English by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in 2002. The novel represents the Munda tribe as a peaceful people who are forced to resistance and violence. Satisfied to lead their simple traditional life and observe their festivals, their lives are disrupted by outside forces that destroy their peaceful existence. The central character Chotti is a wise and far-sighted leader, whose name is becoming a myth through the songs and stories of the Mundas. The narrative links him to Birsha and Dhani, legendary leaders of the Mundas in their struggles. The novel reconstructs the Munda's past from oral narratives narrated by characters and the novelist's own, from pre-colonial, colonial to independence, emergency and post-emergency and upto the Naxalite movement. The reconstruction of history through the local stories and songs are powerful social texts. Mahasweta Devi, as writer and an active social activist is in constant touch with the marginalised of society and knowing them firsthand, her representation too is considered to be as close to the authentic as possible.

In view of the above discussions of ethnography and literature, the study is divided into 5 (Five) chapters and organised in the following manner:

Chapter 1

Introduction: Ethnographic Narrative and Literature

The chapter proposes the ethnographic novel as a sub-genre of novel writing. Through recent literary theories it highlights the changing concepts in ethnography, literature and narrative. As the majority of the novels undertaken for study are translated works, it is also proposed that translation in itself is an act of representation. The chapter is theoretical in approach.

Chapter 2

Representing the Tribal in Indian Literature

The chapter highlights notions of the Tribal, constructed through pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial texts. It examines identity as construct against self-identity. It deals with the problematic relationship between history and literature, fact and fiction, for Indian history began with literary texts which are not coherent bases for Tribal history. The chapter is interdisciplinary in approach.

Chapter 3

Ethnographic Novels: Representing the Tribal in *Phulmat of the Hills: A Tale of the Gonds* and *Paraja*

Both Verrier Elwin and Gopinath Mohanty wrote their novels during colonial rule. As a self-made ethnographer, Elwin showed that ethnography can be written from the point of view of the man of literature, by changing the scientific trend in objective study of ethnographic subjects, to a more personalised subjective trend. Elwin was instrumental in setting in the romantic trend in representing the Tribal whom he lived with in the later part of his life. Mohanty was a colonial officer who was posted in tribal areas where he came in close contact with the people he represented in *Paraja.* With his lyrical prose he combined the romantic, primitivist and realistic trend in representing the Parajas of Orissa.

Chapter 4

Ethnographic Novels: Representing the Tribal in *The Primal Land and Chotti Munda and His Arrow*

Both Pratibha Ray and Mahasweta Devi are contemporary women writers. Their novels as will be seen are representations of the Tribal in post-colonial India. Their mood in representing the Tribal has changed from that of the romantic and idylistic representations to that of resurgence and resistance. Pratibha Ray stayed in the Bonda inhabitat while doing research work and had the opportunity to understand the Bonda way of life to represent them in her ethnonographic novel. While Mahasweta Devi as a social activist has immense knowledge of tribals with whom she maintains staunch solidarity while representing them in her writings.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

As studies proceed on ethnography and literature, the thesis concludes that as ethnography moves closer towards Arts and literature, it is being appropriated to many contemporary disciplines. Literature with which ethnography had always had close affinity should not lag behind in appropriating ethnography within the ambit of its discipline. It also concludes that the ethnographic novel is an important device in representing a people by speaking out from within their culture.

As representations of the Tribal in Indian literature proceed the thesis deals with the problematic relationship between history and literature, between fact and fiction, since Indian history as mentioned earlier, began with literary texts where there is no coherent history of the Tribal. As the poetics of ethnography pays attention to oral

narratives that give clues to a society's history, the ethnographic novel narrates a people's history connecting it to their present and giving answers as to why people behave and take actions as they do. The thesis concludes that the Tribal is made to 'speak-out' through the ethnographic novel by paying attention to his own narratives which renders the ethnographic novel as a contending ground to the Tribal's history, parallel to documented history. The thesis then leaves space for theoretical discussions across interdiscipline and opens up space for further research.

Endnotes

[1]**Ethnography** with its diverse ways in representing peoples and cultures has also resorted to using the novel form. The device is used by both anthropologists and novelists, since the novel form of writing can be descriptive, dialogistic, and polyphonic while imaginative. It can bring out individualistic and subjective issues of the writer as well as characters. It keeps the anonymity of informants.

[2]In the relationship between the intellectual and the masses, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze had conflated both the use of **representation** – representation as "speaking for" (politics) and representation as "to re-present" (art and philosophy). Gayatri C. Spivak in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" uses the term to 'represent' the subaltern subject as a form of a self-questioning on the part of the intellectual. To confront them is not to represent them, but to learn to represent ourselves. See Hau, Caroline S. "On Representing Others". Moya, Paula M. L. and Micheal R. Hames-Garcia eds. *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism.* Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2000.

[3.] According to Edward M. Bruner, some scholars make a sharp distinction between the ethnographer as subject and the **native peoples as object** of investigation, to the extent that we see the ethnographer as an outsider looking in, the privileged stranger who can perceive patterns not apparent to those within the system. But such assumptions have changed. See Bruner, Edward M. "Ethnography as narrative". Mieke Bal ed. *Narrative TheoryVol. 1V: Critical Concepts in l Studies.* NY: Routlege, 2004.

[4.] After the Romantics rebelled from the classical rules, this attitude is carried over in not only into aesthetics of Modernism but also into many strands of twentieth century literary theory. The New Critics devaluated a text's generic features as extrinsic to its literariness. Post-stucturalists question any interpretative privilege or literary authority genres may be said to have. According to David Duff, genre theory today signals opportunity and common purpose: genre functions as an enabling device for writers and readers, the vehicle for the acquisition of competence. Genre fosters generic competence, that is, ability (1) to recognize and interpret the codes typical of a given genre: and (2) to

perceive departures from it. Bhaktin expanded the whole genre theory to encompass the entire field of verbal activity. Todorov holds that genres are born " {q}uite simply from other genres. A new **genre** is always the transformation of one or several genres: it is a system in constant transformation of one or several genres: by inversion, by displacement, by combination...There has never been a literature without genres: it is a system in constant transformation, and historically speaking the question of origins cannot be separated from the terrain of genres themselves" (*Genres*: 15). And genres as social institutions "bring to light the constructive features of the society to which they belong (*Genres:* 19). Jacques Derrida reveals the fact that generic divisions and sub-divisions do not simply arise from literature itself, but result from the designations of writers, critics, and theorists. The designation "detective fiction" for example, refers to all texts that the literary institution, in a given epoch or throughout the ages, accepts as "detective fiction". Setting of such boundary is always self-referential, for a genre defines a literary phenomenon in terms of itself. Each time we classify a given text as an instance of a given genre, we cannot help but identify in the text features that this classification deems pertinent. Finally, the law of genres suggests that a generic classification invariably under-determines a text, because it lifts out only some relevant textual traits at the expense of others. A generic classification never covers the whole global text. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd,* for instance, could profitably be read as a romance or as a comedy of manners, and not just as a detective story. See Pyrhonen, Heta, "Genre". Herman David ed.*The Cambridge Companion to Narrative.*NY: Cambridge UP,2007.

[5.] **Time and space** are more than background elements in narrative. They are part of its fabric, affecting our basic understanding of narrative text and of the protocols of different narrative genres. They profoundly influence the way in which we build mental images of what we read. The process of reading is situated experience of the physical space of the text. See Bridgeman, Teresa. "Time and Space". David Herman ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.

[6.] "This enterprise, 'the understanding of understanding,' is nowadays usually referred to as hermeneutics, and in that sense what I am doing fits well enough under such a rubric,

particularly if the word 'culture' is affixed." – Clifford Geertz in *Local Knowledge.* London: Basic Books, 2000.

[7.] The **realist** theory does not preclude the openness of theory-dependant knowledge to analysis, evaluation, and revision. It need not be deliberated by positive assumptions about certainty and unrevisability. See Hau, Caroline S. "On Representing Others". Moya, Paula M. L. And Micheal R. Hames-Garcia eds. *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism.* Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2000.

[8.] Saint-Simon and Augustine Comte saw sociology as providing both determinate laws of society and a new humanistic religion by which to guide society, or on the other hand, the work of the "Vienna Circle" logical positivists, who sought to clarify the validity of scientific statements. Those approaches to science based on identifying facts with measurable entities are loosely called positivist. **Positivism** indicates knowledge that relies on theoretical formalism and quantitative measurement and holds the methods of the natural science as an ideal. See Marcus, George E. And Michael Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences.* Chicago: Chicago UP, 1986.

[9.] Levi-Strauss views culture as a product of the generative powers of the human mind. Early enquiries searched for these basic generative principles of culture in incest taboo which, in his view, drives humans to create increasingly ingenious solutions to the problem of organising relatedness. Later studies focused on myth as, again, a cognitive attempt to solve basic anatomies in human social existence. See Blasco, Paloma Gay y and Huon Wardle. *How to Read Ethnography.* London: Routledge, 2007.

[10.] According to Bijay Kumar Das, Subaltern Studies in the Asian context is not the same as the Western historians' attempts to write 'history from below'. According to him literature in order to be vibrant should be written in the language of the people and that subaltern studies are not a valid approach to the study of literary texts. That literature is not a branch of social sciences and therefore, cannot be evaluated according to the methods adapted by subaltern studies. See Das, Bijay Kumar. *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism.* Delhi: Atlanta, 2005.

[11.] **Paradigm** has become a very popular concept. It's now conventional use is to mean an established set of questions that are to be answered by research program. The analogy is with a grammatical paradigm where one fills in the forms of a declension or conjugation without asking if the grammarian who formulated the rules has done so with as much accuracy as possible for representing the language. The usage of 'paradigm' to talk about fields of research was initiated through Thomas Kuhn's influential book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (1962). Kuhn describes Paradigm shift as being marked by the rapid collapse in confidence in one paradigm as the new one gains ascendency. See Blasco, Paloma Gay y and Huon Wardle. *How to Read Ethnography.*London: Routledge, 2007. Also Marcus, George E. And Michael M. J. Fischer. *Anthropology as Cultural Critique.* Chicago: Chicago UP, 1999.

[12] Even in the field of anthropology, **Marxist** analysis gained ground during the mid 1970s as a response to lack of analysis of structures of inequality in classic ethnographies. Marxist anthropologists looked for bases of inequality in how groups gained and consolidated control over material gained and consolidated control over material resources. This historical materialist viewpoint influenced a range of ethnographers who might not call themselves Marxist. See Blasco Paloma gay y and Huon Wardle. *How to Read Ethnography.* London: Routledge, 2007.

[13.] **Discourse** in late Latin came to mean "a communication or conversation that goes back and forth through debate and discussion," and is used in the general sense of a formal discussion, treaties or sermon on a subject in speech or writing, but more specifically in contemporary criticism, in the way Michel Foucault defines it as the institutionalized social limitations determining what can be said on a particular context. See Bhaduri, Saugata ed. *Translating Power: Stories. Essays. Criticism* New Delhi: Katha, 2008.

[14.] For Hiedegger there is no such thing as a free-floating, wordless subject. Human subjectivity is always already situated, in the world, with others, yet never at home. See Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time.* Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell, 1927. Also, Antony Easthope, *Literary Into Cultural Studies.* London: Routledge, 1992.

[15.] According to James Clifford, to recognise the poetic dimensions of ethnography does not require that one give up facts and accurate accounting for the supposed free play of poetry. 'Poetry' is not limited to romantic or modernist subjectivism; it can be historical, precise, and objective. This does not mean that ethnography is 'only literature'. It is always writing. See Clifford, James and George E. Marcus ed. " Partial Truths". James Clifford and George E. Marcus eds. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography.* London: California UP, 1986.

[16.] Tradition of anthropology associated with mainstream American anthropology, with major anthropologists as Franz Boas, Alfred Kroeber, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead and Cifford Geertz. The emphasis in **cultural anthropology** has tended to be on culture as a patterned whole and hence on the interpretation of integrated patterns/systems symbolism and meaning. This is distinct from **social anthropology** which emphasises the organisation of social relationships. See Blasco, Paloma Gay y and Huon Wardle. *How to Read Ethnography.* London: Routledge, 2007.

[17.] The notion of 'critique' (as opposed to mere criticism) derived from the eighteen-century Enlightenment effort to clarify concepts, to evaluate the relation between their logical grounds and their degree of validity. In the early twenty-first century **cultural critique** faces new challenges due to massive demographic shifts that have challenged the idea of culturally homogenous nation-state; transnational communication and visual media in new modalities. See Blasco, Paloma Gay y and Houn Wardle. *How to Read Ethnography.* London: Routledge, 2007.

[18.] Typically a tendency to refer to specific cultural contexts in order to explain particular meanings. There can be no absolute relativism in anthropology because this would rule out the possibility of cultural translation. Strong **relativising** tendencies are opposed by strong universalising ones. Universalism is a tendency to refer to human universals or absolutes to explain particular meanings. Strong universalism may encounter the basic difficulty of finding an explanation for social phenomena that approximates to how actors involved talk about them. Ethnography is invariably a compromise between relativism and universalism. See Blasco, Paloma Gay y and Huon Wardle. *How to Read Ethnography.* London: Routledge, 2007.

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Chapter 2
Representing the Tribal in Indian Literature

> Questions about identity are always questions about representation.. They are always about the invention, not simply the discovery of tradition. They are always exercises in the selective memory and they almost always involve the silencing of something in order to allow something else to speak.
>
> - Stuart Hall ("Negotiating Caribbean Identities": 283)

Post-colonial discourses in posing questions on identity opens up a theoretical space into challenging the silenced marginalised and oppressed groups of people into re-defining themselves against the identities that had been forced upon them. Representing a group of people and narrativising their past without their say in the matter are manifestations of power, dominance and subjugation. In the context of India, history and colonial ethnography are main grounds wherein the Tribal's identity had been constructed without his say in the matter. History perceived as fact and ethnography as scientific validity were indeed authoritative enough. Today history and colonial ethnography are challenged as fiction in that they base themselves on facts but fictionalise the narrative, so history and colonial ethnography have become grounds for contestations by those who represent the silenced silent.

Whatever notions and perceptions of the Tribal that we have in India, the past is mainly filtered through historical and ethnographic texts. And in the contemporary scene, our knowledge is sensitised through the readings of sociological narratives and Subaltern historiography. Literary representations that were made of the Tribal arose mainly through the understanding of historical and ethnographical texts. As representations of the Tribal emerge from writers who lived in close proximity with the tribals, made

fieldwork research on their way of life and even attempting to write parallel history of the Tribal, we begin to re-think or reflect on the knowledge system that we have taken for granted. In the context of representing the Tribal in India, to understand and re-define him, literary and non-literary texts have to be studied side by side, which calls for an interdisciplinary approach for today the broader concept of writing as narrative have blurred the boundary between fact and fiction and history, ethnography and narrative have begun to lose their conceptual rigidity.

Spivak, while dealing with subaltern studies admits that the discourse of history and the discourse of literature are more congruent than diverse. For her the primary difference between the two is that "what is called history will always seem more real to us than what is called literature" (Spivak: 224). And the ways in which this difference is articulated has a 'hidden agenda' closely related to 'social connotations' of the two disciplines. Yet finally, the historian and the novelist share more similarities than differences:

> Those who read or write literature can claim as little of subaltern status as those who read or write history. The difference is that the subaltern as subject is supposed to be imagined in one case and real in another. I am suggesting that it is a bit of both cases. The writer acknowledges this by claiming to do research (my fiction is also history). The historian might acknowledge this by working at the mechanics of representation (my history is also fictive) (Spivak: 224).

Here what is being indicated is that history as writing is also fiction, and fiction can also claim to be history due to the amount of research that have been undertaken in the writing and representation of the subject.

Pre-colonial literary tradition did not distinguish between history and literature. The Sanskrit word *itihasa* which means 'it was thus' is now understood to mean history.

The word "emphasized the factual, but the literary genre bearing this name straddled chronicle as well as fiction" (Mukherjee: 41-42). For, *Itihasa* used to be considered as a genre of composition like the *Kavya* (poetry) or *natya* (drama). When the first generation of the English educated Indians with a new nationalistic awareness awakened to historical consciousness, the historical novels appeared in the literary scene. The novelists found that history, if necessary could be altered to suit their purpose better. "Thus the writing of fiction based on history, with varying degrees of accuracy, was a necessary part" (ibid: 40). What is indicated here is that history and literature have common agendas, as to why a text is written, written for whom and how.

Anthropology and its subset ethnography perceived as scientific study of mankind had served many a time as parallel history to colonial empirical history. The British administration relied many times on the ethnographic texts as the ethnographer's information depended on knowledge gathered from remote areas that were difficult to penetrate. Ethnography still remains today an important device in representing a people. Thus, what is being implied here is that representations of the Tribal in the Indian context, which has found expressions in literary texts, are the influences of history, anthropology and sociology. Being concerned with the study of Man, society and culture, scholars in these disciplines have largely contributed to the concepts and representations of the tribes that we have today in India.

In present times, eco-criticism with its roots in liberation theology has brought forth thoughtful discourses that can be useful to save planet Earth. A point made by its critics is that we should recall age old discarded tribal beliefs and wisdom, like the sacredness he sees in nature, his attitude toward land as 'mother earth' who gives him his identity and whom he would never treat with disrespect, for the land belongs to the

Creator who has the power to bless or destroy. The Tribal had always had his own natural sense of the land that he lived in. He had always seen himself as protector of the forest and the environment around him. The question posed in this context is why has all the natural ways of the Tribal been discarded as unproductive and ancient. Whom do we identify as tribals and how do we define them in the context of India? What are the perceptions and conceptions of them that we have are the questions that come to mind.

'Tribe' is defined as any

> ...of a variety of social units, including some defined by unilineal descent and some defined by ethnic origin. Cultural anthropologists now usually apply the term to a unit of social organization that is culturally homogenous and consists of multiple kinship groups – such as FAMILY, lineage, or CLAN -...Most tribes are organized as unitary political entities, within which people share a common language and culture. Some tribes are spread across large territories, and individual members may never meet or know all of the others. Some are small groups, confined to a limited territory, sometimes a single island, within which everyone knows everyone else very well. What unites societies of such diverse scales as being "tribal" is their internal sense of "being a single people," (Britannica Ready Reference Encyclopaedia, vol 10: 15).

The descriptions given here shows that a 'tribe' means a people who have formed a community from common descent, language and culture that give them the sense of being a single people. If such is the definition of what a tribe is, every civilisation in the world has gone through such a stage at one time or the other. However, in the context of India, the term 'tribe' carry negative connotations which are the outcome of representations made of tribals through literary and non-literary texts. This has not changed in post-independent India, where many of the so called 'tribes' in India remain at the bottom of the economic margin where many have lost their lands to money-lenders, work as bonded labourers, forced to work in ill conditions and despised for their

poverty. As many tribal groups have not yet acquired scripts of their own they are defenceless to written cultures that have the power to represent them, often into what they are not, that render them to be silenced silent entities.

In a post-modern world that celebrates multiplicity and difference, India prides its diversity and its secular democratic republic which calls for equality and rights for all its citizens. However the majority of tribals remain at the bottom of the social scale. Most tribes maintain their own religious practices and ways of life. With traditional egalitarian and casteless society, they do not belong to any Hindu caste system and therefore they are regarded as the 'other' in the Indian social system which is still class conscious, bounded to traditional historical consciousness, hierarchical notions, false ideology and traditions. After more than fifty years of India's independence, not much has changed in the manner in which the Tribal is looked upon. Even when well meaning accounts of the Tribal is given, it is usually indicated as 'them' as different from 'us'. Ramachandra Guha has used for his book the title *Savaging the Civilised* (1999) while writing the biography of Verrier Elwin, his world of tribals and India, and chose to use the word 'savage' to indicate the tribals.

Mahasweta Devi in her article "The Jharkhand Movement" (1980) says that the reason we do not know the tribals is because of our unfamiliarity with them. This is because of our age old belief that "India means India of caste Hindus" (104). She says that we do not care to really know the tribals and stick to stereotyped images of them, promoted largely by films and plays.

> Tribals on the screen or the stage inevitably wear feathered head-dresses if they are males and flowers if they are women, wear scanty clothing – near-nakedness is compulsory – just to emphasize their innocence. And lastly, the typical dance and music. Not that these are not part of tribal life,

> but certainly not in the way they are shown. This synthetic image still exists even in the minds of the educated people. (idid: 105)

She has a word for the educated people who cannot tolerate educated tribals who wear sophisticated clothes and attend seminars:

> Is it realistic to expect that the tribals would wait patiently for ages, forgoing education, wearing loin-cloths, bows and arrows in hand, in their 'unadulterated' and 'unsophisticated' form, completely alienated from the mainstream of life, in the hope that someday people like these would have the time and inclination to go and meet them? (ibid)

Macdonell had remarked that, "history is the weak spot of Indian literature. In fact, it is non-existent...Early India wrote no history because it never made any" (8-9). Most pre-colonial writings in historical matters according to him are either mythological or religious and are not concerned with plain historical truth. Such absence of historical past or truth is most acute in the context of the tribals. According to Deliege:

> The tribals fascinate as much as they frighten. Like the demons, whom they resemble, they belong to another world; warriors but not Kshatriyas...they do not fit the rigid frame of the caste system which is also contradicted by their morals, habits and values. Here is manifest the whole nature of the paradox which relates the tribes to their Hindu neighbours: like the spirits or *bhuts* with whom they are sometimes confounded... they are feared, invoked and even used, but they belong to another universe. If the stories and legends do not provide us with historical evidence, they nevertheless carry an image of the tribe which helps us to seize the nature of the concept...They cannot be pigeonholed; they live in another world (34).

There have been a few attempts to correct history, but this has gained little impact for past representations made in history, ethnography and literary texts have formed stereotype images of the Tribal. The past "has undermined the whole concept of the study of tribal life and this is why we do not have coherent, logical or broadly applicable definitions of a 'tribe' (Gavit and Chand qtd by Rath: 67) in the context of India. Even

the sociologist Jaganath Pathy had written that 'tribe' has become an "ideological concept" wherein the

> ...uncritical acceptance of the administrative category has contributed to the perpetuation of certain stereotype images of such communities that were popularised by colonial rule. (Pathy: 45)

Modernism and Psychoanalysis has penetrated into studies in identity and that to formulate one's own identity one needs the co-operation of others, for what we perceive of ourselves may not be what others perceive of us. Thus in order that the pre-conceived notions that are inherent in our minds of the tribals to be changed and to be redefined, they need the co-operation of others. To understand them and to know them as human beings like anyone.

Tribals by tradition do not have the feeling of inferiority as lower castes in Hindu society do. But in the course of being alienated from their lands and forests, their economic structure has crumbled, while on the other hand they are unable to catch up with modern materialism for lack of modern education. As their poverty gets acute they are exploited and have to bow to their exploiters wherein their pride is subdued and their natural free spirit crippled. One needs to know that tribes have their own sense of distinctiveness and culture and many are proud of who they are and want to preserve their cultures.

When Verrier Elwin married his first wife Kosi, who was a member of the *Raj* Gond, members of her tribe felt that she married someone below her. So, the two had to elope for Kosi's family to consent to their marriage. Though poor, the Gonds certainly defined themselves as superior to the white Oxford graduate. This shows that tribals have their own sense of identity and idigenity in spite of what is defined and perceived of

them. The Gonds still cling to memories of an age when they had their own rulers and led prosperous lives. Elwin's mother on the other hand saw Kosi's family as a member of a 'savage' race.

Tribes of north-east India again claim their distinctiveness from other tribes of India. Renthy Keitzer puts the north-eastern tribals this way:

> The tribals of North East India should not be clubbed together with other tribals and Dalits in the rest of India. The tribals in North East India, especially the hill tribals, should not be considered as low caste people; in their case, the nomenclature is only a political designation, an ambiguous term,...so, it is not to be associated with the low caste people, because they are not found by the Hindu *varna* system and, therefore, they should not be classified along with the low caste Hindus. (qtd by Massey: 73)

Tribes may share similarities in some context, but it is imposible to conclude a homogenised study of different tribes in India. Cultural boundaries overlap, language and tradition differ in every context; and myths have ways of travelling and the origin contested. Both *sanskritization* and *tribalisation* has worked in certain parts of the interstices of the country, as people mingle and cultures go through change - get hybridised or disappear wholly. Verrier Elwin, given the amount of knowledge he acquired about the tribes of India, his extensive experience in fieldwork and with the bulk of ethnographical works he had written on different tribes of India is accused of not having "adequate information regarding ground realities" (Danda: 45). Nor was he aware "of the diversities that existed in tribal India" and did not depend "on scientific information as well as reasoning" (ibid). Though homogenised deduction cannot be done, similarities to their conditions are found among many tribes throughout India.

Consisting of 461 groups and constituting 8 per cent of the total population in India, the total tribal population in India is 83,580,634 in the 2001 census. Among them

80 per cent of them live in the 'central belt', extending from Gujarat and Rajasthan in the west, and across the states of Maharastra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa, to West Bengal and Tripura. Most of the remaining 20 per cent live in the north-eastern states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim and the Union Territories of Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Andaman and Nichobar, and Lakshadweep while a few of them live in the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Among the southern states Andhra Pradesh has the largest tribal population.

Ramsharan Joshi, who had travelled extensively throughout India and having made an extensive study of different tribal societies, found the conditions of tribal societies similar throughout the country. In *Tribals: Land of Deprivation* (1984) he writes in his author's note that before he went out on his venture, his journalist friends had frightened him by painting "a hellish and devilish picture of the tribal community" (xvii). So the tribal world appeared to him as an "island of mysteries and horror" (ibid) and as he ventured out on his project he set out with "the urban prejudices and biases against the tribals" (xviii). His later experience amongst the tribals changed the myths of his pre-conceived notions of the tribals. He found them to be "simple, beautiful, nature-loving and egalitarian humanity facing threats of diminution" (ibid) and that their fight for survival had been going on since the time of intrusion of modern civilisation into their territories that have broken their rhythm of life. Their traditional values as he observed is on the verge of disintegration. "A civilised barbarity has replaced primitive innocence" (ibid). His journey he notes was to witness an "island of half-clad suffering and deprived people" (ibid).

Jean Dreze, who wrote the forward of *Tribal Development in India: The Contemporary Debate* (2006) writes about his experiences while taking a *padayatra* (walking tour) through tribal areas in India. In spite of what is believed of the tribals, ground experience told a different story. He found that they have scientific outlook, "relatively egalitarian values, co-operative social norms, and an admirable sense of aesthetic" (12).

Such firsthand accounts clearly indicate the prejudiced concepts of urban society in their attitudes towards the tribals. Identity construction of a community that had been forced on them brings forth questions as to who represents whom? How and why? For the tribals to speak out and reconstruct their identity, they need the co-operation of others, which in turn will contribute towards a better understanding of the predicaments they face today, to re-examine the prejudices constructed by time and history.

Scholars differ as to which race are the aboriginal settlers in India. Most agree to the point that the people that are now called 'tribe' who belong to different races even though they may not be the inhabitants of the area they now occupy are "the purest aboriginal community" as Lacey in *Census of India 1931* had noted. India in refusing to join the UN's Permanent Forum which has declared the International Decade of the World's Indigenous people in 1993 shows its refusal in accepting that there are any indigenous people in the country. India also rejected the ILO (International Labour Organisation) conventions 107 and 169, which confer special territorial rights on indigenous peoples all over the world. However, the ambiguity is that many Indian writers till as of late have the tendency to consider the "tribal" and the "indigenous" as interchangeable terms. For in spite of not awarding tribals of India the indigenous status, the concept of their indigenousness persists in the minds of many.

Cultural sociologists, in tracing Indian history, believe that during the long Hindu period after the Aryans came around 800-600 B.C. different tribes either accepted the Hindu religion of their neighbours and those who could not tolerate the rigid Brahmanical order receded further into the forests retaining their tribal culture. Different tribes seem to have moved across the country and their movements generally guided by the river valleys and their destinations being the forest regions. According to Ghurye (1963) most sections of different tribes adapted the Hindu faith and only small sections receded to the recesses of the forests and retained tribal way of life.

Drawing from historians and anthropologists, tribals of India are mainly forest dwellers living in isolated regions and hills. They are known by different names such as *Vanjajati*, meaning castes of forest, *Vanvasi*, which means inhabitants of the forest, *Pahari,* or hill-dwellers, *Adimjati*, or primitive people, *Adivasi*, or first settlers, *Janjati,* or folk people, *Anusuchit Janjati,* or scheduled tribe. Amongst all these terms *Adivasi* is known most extensively, and *Anusuchit Janjati Scheduled Tribe* is the constitutional name covering all of the tribes (Rai: 25). According to anthropologists and historians four main races and cultures form the Indian people. These are the *Austro-Asiatic* group such as the Kols or the Mundas, the Khasis and the Nichobarese, the *Mongoloid* group such as the Sino-Tibetan and the Kuki-Chins, the *Dravidian* group such as the Malers, the Oraons, the Gonds and the Khonds, and the *Aryans,* who are believed to be the last settlers in India. The Aryans referred to all non-Aryans as *Dasyus* or 'other people'.

According to Joseph Bara who has based his study on tribes in the Chhotanagpur area says that the term *adivasi* is a fought and won term, which denotes a sense of indigenity. That Jaipal Singh, the president of the Adhivasi Sabha had stated that the tribals, "as citizens of this country", were "equal in status to others" and that as "adivasi

– the original settlers" they wanted to remove the stigma of "*dalit jati"*. The Mundas and Uraons in the Chhotanagpur area took the terms *adimjati* or *vananchal* as pejorative, for it indicated sub-human status. However, the term *adivasi* though popularly used did not liberate the tribes from inherent bias. In independent India, *adivasi* officially became 'scheduled tribe' or *anusuchit janjati*, with parenthetic of jati (caste) as a legacy of colonial ethnography (95). However the term *Adivasi* again is not acceptable to tribes of the north-east as it is alien to them.

Tribals have been mentioned by the Aryans in the ancient Sanskrit literatures such as the *Rig-Veda*. The Aryans also adopted some of the tribals' customs. There are also mentions about the rites and rituals of the tribals as very different from that of the Aryans. The tribals are also mentioned as having stable rulers with immense wealth. They were progressive, but had to struggle against Aryan invasions. As enemies to the Aryan settlers they are depicted in the ancient texts as 'demons' and 'beasts'. This is based on three Sanskrit words *Asura, Danava* and *Daitya* which are supposed to be used to denote aboriginal tribes.

Adikavi Valmiki's the *Ramayana* also contains references to encounters with different tribes and tribal characters are also depicted in his epic. *Vanaras*, which stands for monkey, are regarded as the hill tribes of southern India. The Gridhas and Suparnas are named after birds for their nomadic habit. The tribals had shown great love and devotion to Rama while he was in exile, living the life of a *sanyasi* in the forests for fourteen years, like the characters of Guha, the *Nishadraj*, and Sabari the *Tapaswini*.

In the *Mahabharata*, tribal characters are portrayed as having embodiment of heroism, joviality and devotion. They also played important roles in the Mahabharata Battle. The heroic qualities of Abhiraj and Kirat make them important figures. The

devotion of Ekalavy to his *Guru* has been beautifully portrayed in the epic. The bravery of Abhiraj is incomparable when he defeated Arjun with the help of the Bhil army. Seeing the bravery of Kirat, Shiva took the form of Kirat when he went to meet Arjun. In the 7th century, Banabhatta has depicted tribal life in his *Kadambari* where the forest life of Sabars and Bhils has been beautifully portrayed.

It is through the readings of ancient texts that sociologists are of the opinion that the tribes had one time or the other been in touch with neighbouring cultures. Chaturvedi (2008) has claimed that the Aryans' attitude towards the tribes was of tolerance for some time. There was peaceful co-existence between the Aryans and the tribes till the days of the *Ramayana*. However, in the later literatures, from *Mahabharata* and *Kadambari*, there are laudatory and derogatory passages written on the tribes. They were excluded from social integration due to rigid caste hierarchy of the Brahmanic organisation, with their rigid customs and habits. Thus, many groups relined further into the forests to maintain their own way of life. In spite of these derogatory passages, according to Chaturvedi, the tribals proved themselves "to be brave, adventurous, courageous, stout, devoted, loyal, integral, honest, free, unintentional, innocent, skilled and well organised" (19). Nineteenth century writer John Malcolm verifies these qualities and makes them more convincing when he writes of the tribals thus:

> They are faithful, honest, active, and capable of great fatigue, devoted to their master, quick and having a kind of instinctive sense of danger and are full of art and evasion. (qtd by Chaturvedy: ibid)

According to historiographic narratives, during the beginning of the medieval period, the tribals enjoyed an amount of autonomy. But by the end of the 16th century they were harassed by Mohammedian rulers and gradually lost their autonomy. Taxes of

various kinds were imposed on them, which showed the beginning of the agrarian troubles amongst the tribals. Large numbers of them also embraced Islam, especially the Bhils. In the 15th century the Gonds established their own kingdom in Garha, but they were overpowered by the Mughals and had to bow down before them. The dynasty came to an end when the Marathas captured their last ruler. The Rajputs in their thirst for lands also displaced many tribals from their lands. The emergence of several self-imposed *rajas* who projected themselves as superior beings resulted in placing the tribals "as low caste, turbulent wretches, in person like men, but in mind like beasts (Bara: 91).

The Banjaras had to collaborate with the Moghul army and in the process settled in various parts of south India. The Khasa area in the Himalayan region was trampled by Gujjars, the Rajputs and Sikhs and then eventually by the Gurkhas. The Ahoms also captured Bodo area. Thus, it was during this period that the tribal people inhabiting various parts of India were either disturbed by the then Mohamedan rulers as well as regional rulers. The Moghuls saw the tribes as "original savage race" or "barbarous Hindus" (Dalton qtd by Bara: 91).

The Modern period started with the British rule in India and tribals had fought fiercely against the British intervention into their territories. Subsequently, they had to face many difficulties of encroachment and exploitation after the British intervention, for with the administrative processes, many new settlers, money lenders and contractors began to settle inside tribal territories, exploiting them in various ways. The various land settlement policies of the British rule affected their ownership of the forests and lands. There were many unrests and revolts from the tribals, but they were always suppressed by the power that ruled. A good number of tribals converted to Christianity, for in desperation many sought the protection of the Missions which helped them in their health

care and education. The Missions also helped many tribals in fighting against greedy land owners to protect their lands. On the other hand, the tribals to embrace Christianity meant giving up their valued traditional ways. They had to forfeit their own indigenous faith and practices as well as their traditional feasts and festivals that they had so far valued and enjoyed. However, Christianity gave a new sense of identity and indeginity, as according to Bara:

> Christianity became a means for cultural restoration that would yield them their rights and human dignity. Their effort for recovery of the lost rights and dignity led them to, as indicated by the Sardari Larai, the idea of autonomous status (Bara: 94).

With colonialism, colonial ethnography further brought the term 'tribe' to its further derogation. The colonisers,

> Based on their experience in America, Africa, Australia, New Zealand and island societies, took for granted that the people who inhabited the mountains, the forest and other peripheral areas were outside the Hindu fold and labelled them as 'tribes' (Misra: 58).

The colonial ethnographers then made use of the prevailing local knowledge for information especially the popular Purana of the 18th century, the *Bhavisyatra Purana*, which was used, wherein tribes were defined as 'demons' and 'beasts'.

> When colonial ethnography embarked upon defining the tribe, it relied upon the traditional Sanskritic sources – now "Orientalised" for the colonial project – which was replete with alternatives of the beastly image of tribe. The local Indian idea of tribe, thus, colluded with the western racist idea, demeaning the concept doubly. (Bara: 92)

Robert Deliege, in his book *The Bhils of Western India (1985)* writes that the 'image' of the Bhils that had been painted is one of "...fascination and fear. He is the romantic bandit both lawless and grateful" (19). From early times until the British

intervention, the Indians knew nothing about the mountains and forests, "inhabited by monsters and fabulous beings" (Ramadas: 28). Forsyth wrote about the tribals thus:

> All accounts of such tracts were filtered through Hindu and Mohomedan subordinates, whose horror of a jungle, and its unknown terrors of bad air and water, wild beasts, and general discomfort, is such as to ensure their painting the country and its people in the blackest colours (17).

The tribes in Chotanagpur had been said to be:

> ... beastly and monstrous normally, were, in exceptional cases, considered gentle and humane. But it was so only under godly influence or brahminical ambassadorial touch of 'civilisation'. (Bara: 92)

As noted in the previous chapter, though the study of anthropology can be traced back to ancient Greece, the study of modern anthropology as a serious discipline began during the nineteenth century, with expansion and colonialism. Colonialists in their 'discovery' of different peoples and in trying to 'know' their subjects of colonialism took up the study of anthropology with serious zeal, which culminated in a systematic study of *primitive man*. Colonial anthropological works clearly show the classical heritage of anthropology in the various theories regarding the over-all development of human cultures and in particular, the religious doctrines of a former golden age, the theory of the Stoics and the theory of progressive development. In these theories may be traced the

> ...fundamental opposition between a theological theory of degeneration and a scientifically oriented belief in progressive development, which asserted itself in the nineteenth century. (Sills : 308)

Such is modern anthropology's concept of *primitivism* or *primitive man,* with its anti-progressive attitude.

According to Johannes Fabian the constitution of modern anthropological concept is a shift from the pre-modern Christian concept of time and space to the modern secular one. This shift transformed the *pagan* into the *savage*:

> Enlightenment thought marks a break with an essential medieval, Christian vision of Time. That break was one from a conception of time/space in terms of a history of salvation to one that ultimately resulted in the secularization of Time as natural history... the pagan was always *already* marked for salvation, the savage is *not yet* ready for civilization... one consists of concentric circles of proximity to a centre in real space and mythical Time, symbolized by the cities of Jerusalem and Rome. The other is constructed as a system of coordinates (centre being the Western metropolis) in which given societies of all times and places may be plotted in terms of relative distance from the present. (Fabian qtd by Thomas: 26)

The policy of 'enlightenment', sometimes described as a 'civilizing mission', was fraught with contradictions. It purported to "mitigate the disintegration of primitive institutions" (Sills: 325) in situations of culture contact; it hoped to "foster the growth of a healthy, progressive, organic society" (ibid: 326); it also aimed at a process of "moral development" (ibid: 326). With this attitude in mind there was a clear Western dichotomy between the 'primitive' and the 'civilized'. The Western 'civilized' gaze looked upon all tribal societies as totally opposed to its own society. It thus defined these tribal societies in pejorative terms, such as 'imperfect', 'childlike', 'perverse' and even 'criminal'. With the same logic, it advocated the policy of 'enlightenment' and 'moral improvement'.

The concept of the Tribal in India which was already an alien construction even before colonialism went in for further misconception under the colonial rule. Added to the pre-colonial concepts, colonial anthropology's discourses brought about the concept

of the Tribal as 'primitive', 'savage', 'wild',' barbarous', 'less human and more of a beast'.

Along with such perceptions of the Tribal, there was also a paradoxical concept that saw the Tribal as a "noble savage" with the characteristics of bravery, faithfulness, honesty, strength and so on, which was applied to him under certain circumstances.

Identifying tribes was part of the larger British administrative exercise in classifying the Indian population. The *Indian Census Report of 1891* for example, while identifying the tribes as Animists, stated that

> ...under the head of Animistic would come all members of the forest tribes who were not locally acknowledged to be Hindu, Musalman, Christian or Buddhist by religion. (158).

Andre Beteille however has pointed out that

> The problem in India was to identify rather than define tribes, and scientific or theoretical considerations were never allowed to displace administrative or political ones. (59)

Several other methods of identifying tribes were also used. A popular one was anthropology's anthropometry. This system was the technique of measuring the various sizes and proportions of the human body for purposes of racial classification and comparison. Another was identifying the Tribal through preliterate languages.

In the process of classifying the tribes of India, under the *Criminal Tribes Act* of 1871, nearly two hundred communities were notified as 'criminal tribe'. Though many tribes today have been de-notified, they still carry the burden of representations made of them till present times. Being thus stigmatised compounds the problem of adjustment and integration into the mainstream living. The case of Chuni Kotal, the first woman graduate among the Lodha-Savara and Kheria-Savara of West Bengal who hanged herself on 16th

August in 1992 is an example. Mahasweta Devi in her activistic writing states that often it is for no reason that these tribes are marked by the police whenever a crime takes place even when it is not in their locality. The process of classifying the tribes was largely a negative one, for in the process of this kind of imposed concept, it meant the suppression of the tribals' own idea of self and community.

The Indian historians of colonial times followed the pattern of the Western methodology. Partha Chatterjee in *The Nation and its Fragments* (1995) compared the Puranic histories written by Indian historians like Mrityunjay in the early nineteenth century, to the later histories which were clearly influenced by Western notions of history. Tarinicharan Chattopadhyay's book, *Bharatbarser Itihas* (The History of India, 1878) was closely modelled on the Western historiographic practice. In describing the inhabitants of India, he wrote:

> In very ancient times, there lived in India two very distinct communities (*sampraday*) of people. Of them, one resembled us in height and other aspects of physical appearance. The descendants of this community are now called Hindu. The people of the other community were short, dark and extremely uncivilized. Their descendents are known as Khas, Bhilla, Pulinda, Saontal and other primitive (*jangla,* "of the bush") jati. (96)

Thus, the ancient Hindu texts and recorded knowledge, theories of Western scholars and theories of early independent India, merged into constructing the identities of the tribals of India. Notions of the tribals which were constructed with bias and superficial notions became recorded knowledge. This process transformed the tribes into peripheral communities within the dominant Hindu structure. It also articulated the keenly felt racial superiority of the Aryans over the 'dasyus'. Taking on the "civilising mission" of western concept the Aryans in seeing themselves as a higher and more cultured race tried to

'Aryanize' the tribals. This notion of the 'primitive' and the 'civilised' continued in independent India.

The British rule in India brought disintegration and disruption for many communities in several ways through the implications of Forest Acts that were implemented. Indian history accounts of the existence of forest management long before the British rule. The forest was divided into areas to be used for hunting and areas for community subsistence. Great care was taken to classify and conserve the various trees, forests produce and wild life. Forests were conserved and precautions taken against deforestation. When the British came to India they found it to be inexhaustible tracks of forest land and they sought to procure as much of timber and agricultural revenue for Britian. Large tracks of forests were cut down mainly for ship building. They accused the tribals of being stupid and destructive, and their methods of cultivation ancient and unproductive when in reality their idea was to gain as much wealth and revenue from the land they had colonised. This action on the part of the British administration negated the rights of the 'native' villagers and the tribal population. Many timber contractors and business men came to settle in the tribal areas. The land holding system of the tribals had been community based and this was exploited by outsiders who came and settled to become money-lenders who exploited the tribals to landlessness and bonded labour leading to a form of feudalism.

The tribals had always viewed themselves as protectors of the forests who possessed ancient knowledge of many medicinal plants which they had utilised through generations. After losing their lands and access to the forests they could not worship their gods in peace in the sacred forests that were associated with their gods nor bury their dead in the forests as was their custom. They were barred from making their own local

drinks that was their source of nourishment which enlivened their spirits. As the outside settlers had better economic status they came to monopolise the British bureaucracy at the crucial subordinate level and exploitation of the Tribal thus continue even today.

The tribals of Chhotanagpur area have their own way of seeing and naming the cunning manipulative outsiders. According to Bara

> Cultural disfiguration and slandering at the hands of the migrants was not taken kindly by the Mundas and Uraons. They did not spare the enemies uncontested. The aliens – initially simply "others" to the tribals – became their hatred *dikus* or exploiting aliens. To express for them, the tribals used the choicest metaphors, such as "greedy vulture", "ravenous crow", "upstart peacock", "ominous owl" and so on. From their cultural standards, the tribals even looked down upon them as people of "low birth" (Bara: 91).

On the other hand, during the 19th century the British administrators were also attracted by the tribals. They found these simple people interesting, honest, brave and accomplished with a free spirit. They could drink, dance and enjoy themselves opposed to the rigid caste ridden Hindus from the plains. Few tribal groups were perceived as 'noble savages'. Such tribal areas became "scheduled areas" and protection was granted to its inhabitants under the *Scheduled Districts Act* of 1874. Their lands were prevented from passing to their exploiters and many tribes remained land owners. Tribal areas in the north-east, Orissa and other areas benefitted from this policy. Nationalist discourse has vehemently criticised the British administration for attempting to segregate the tribes from the mainstream people. They argued that the tribes who were under the protected areas tended to be segregated from the mainstream and saw this as a means of bringing in disunity in the country. Accordingly, they blame present day separatist movements leading to insurgencies as outcome of the erstwhile British administration.

The appearance of Verrier Elwin in the colonial scene saw a change in the concept of the Tribal. Living with the tribals and doing extensive fieldwork in many tribal areas in India especially in the central belt, Elwin began writing his accounts during the 1930s. His approach in writing ethnography deviated from the scientific approach used by the colonial ethnographers and other anthropologists of his time. His writings mainly aimed at dislodging the then prevailing notions of the Tribal as a fearsome, subversive and perverse 'primitive'. As he was not formally trained in the field of anthropology, he showed that ethnography can be written from the point of view of the man of literature. Subjectivising ethnography, he added the romantic approach, which set a trend in romanticising the Tribal. He was one anthropologist who found beauty and inspiration in the Tribal, one who was greatly aware of their distinctiveness. In his autobiography he condemned both Christian missionaries and Social reformers alike who tried to reform the tribes and condemned them for bringing drabness to their cultures. Tribal life had been attacked on grounds of immorality especially their dormitory-system, their nudity and their fondness for their local drinks but which, in the eyes of Elwin were beautiful. His romantic inclination was the influence of poetry. His knowledge of theology encouraged the free spirit of humanity.

Elwin's fear was that the natural free spirit of the Tribal would be destroyed. His fear was that they would be pushed to "the bottom of the social scale". He agreed in later years, that most Indian tribes living in the central belt of India have more affinity with the Hindu tradition. His representation at this point was that the tribes should be given the caste of Kshatriya in the Hindu society, that tribal customary law should be made a part of Hindu law and that the tribal folklores and myths be considered as part of Hindu Purana.

In the early 20th century various Hindu movements started spreading across the country. It was either in reaction to the tribes converting to Christianity in large numbers as well as a genuine desire to reform the tribals. These movements aimed at changing the eating habits of the Tribal, forbade dancing and drinking. They saw the tribal dormitories as places of sexual orgies. They laid stress on clothing the Tribal woman and propagated child marriages to discipline the free spirit of sex. This awakening attitude in reforming the tribes is a form of *Aryanising* or *Sanskritizing* the tribes. The effort to bring them into the folds of the Aryan way of life was due to the belief that the cultural way of life of the Aryans was considered more superior to that of the Tribal's.

Behind these movements was the new nationalistic awareness of the educated Indian dream of a nation which would integrate Indians into one nation and culture. Elwin's proposal for a 'national park' which he had proposed for the tribes of India in his *The Baiga* (1937) provoked vehement criticism. It was supposed to be a place where the tribes could freely live their traditional lives without outside influence. A. V. Thakkar the Congress minded Hindu complained that Elwin was an 'isolationist', who wished to keep the aboriginals away from the national movement. To this Elwin said he was a 'protectionist' who wished to protect the aboriginal from aggressive and insensitive outsiders. An associate of Thakkar accused Elwin of being

> Like the Muslim League, to divide Mother India on communal lines, their 'Pakistan' to be matched by his 'Aboriginalisthan', a special protectorate to be ruled by ethnographers like himself. (qtd by Guha: 155)

Most vocal of Elwin's critics was G. S. Ghurye. The two well known anthropologists of the time were of different temperaments. Ghurye, a scholarly man was a strict Brahmin, a dedicated scholar who hardly left his desk and did very little

fieldwork. Elwin on the other hand was a self-taught anthropologist who lived and mingled with the people he represented. Ghurye, in his book *The Aborigines – So called – and their Future* (1943), pointed out that the tribals had long been involved in Hindu religious movements and structures of authority. The "only proper description of these people" was that they are "the imperfectly integrated classes of Hindu society". Anthropological accuracy demanded that they be called "backward Hindus" rather than be called "aborigines" (Guha: 157).

The new Indian intellectuals framed their understanding of the world in accordance with the western knowledge system. They accepted the western dichotomy between the 'primitive' and the 'civilised', and applied it to the context of the tribes/non-tribes of India. However, there was also a parallel feeling that this dichotomy of savage/ civilised would not work in the context of Indian nationhood. In trying to absorb the tribes into the larger cultural hold, H.H. Risley had described Hinduism as "Animism more or less transformed by philosophy" (qtd by Ghurye: 2). Other writers also found little difference between the religions of the aboriginal tribes and the lower Hindu caste. The works of J.T. Martin, Commissioner of the Census of 1921 and P. C. Tallents, Superintendent of the Census of 1921 for Bihar and Orissa, also made such similar observations (Ghurye: 2-3). It was from such sources that many Indian scholars started detailed exploration into the possible genealogy of different tribal groups of India. This process of exploration often utilised the Hindu epic texts in an attempt to posit the tribals within the emerging nationalist discourse on Indian culture and nationhood. The attempts to *Aryanize* or *Sanskritize* the tribals was largely the 'assimilation' policy of the dream concept of Hindustan.

It is also to be noted that the political movements of the early 20th century generated a lot of indigenous art forms. The *Swadeshi* movement of 1905 to 1908 in particular activated a reaction against colonial reform and led to transformation in many cultural practices. The political doctrine of *Swadeshi* was carried over into the literary arena as well. This resurgence of traditionalism linked with nationalism sparked off interest not only in the Indian courtly arts of the past, but also led to the discovery of folk cultures and literatures including a few tribal literatures. The Tribal had always expressed himself in his songs and stories, but they had never stood up to the powers of the written document.

Elwin in his autobiography admitted his admiration for Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore in their attitudes towards the down-trodden of society and he admitted their influence on him. For Gandhi all the down trodden of India's society were seen as one, whatever background they belonged to. His policy of liberating the lower castes is reflected in the works of Tagore who applied the term 'antaja' to tribals and lower-class alike. The term itself gave rise to certain ambiguities. Its root is traceable to the Sanskrit word 'anta'. 'Anta' contained several meanings, such as: 'lowest', 'worst', 'border', 'outskirts', also 'condition', 'nature' and so on. 'Antaja' referred to the 'last born', whereas 'antavasayin' meant a 'barber', a 'candala'. The use of the term 'antaja' by Tagore seem to indicate that the tribals were then not perceived as different from the lower caste Hindus.

Elwin was instrumental in bringing in the romantic and humanistic trend in representing the Tribal. Behind his representation was his sympathetic mind for the people he represented in his ethnographies and the two novels that he published. However, this mode of representation was ironically followed by romantic but unrealistic

portrayal of the Tribal in literary and visual arts. The Tribal in these kinds of representations is sometimes seen in romantic nascence which is at times grossly unrealistic. Such kinds of representation is a shift in context of the term 'primitive' which indicates the ambivalence always inherent in the 'civilised' gaze of the 'primitive' other.

It can be said that tribal representation in Indian literature or Indian Writing in English began with Verrier Elwin who published his two novels, *Phulmat of the Hills: A Tale of the Gonds* (1937) and *A Cloud that's Dragonish* (1938). The novel *Phulmat of the Hills* will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. *A Cloud That's Dragonish* is about mysterious deaths in the village of Sitalpani, of humans, pets and live stock. The tribal inhabitants take the role of self made detectives. The cause of the deaths falls upon the beautiful Gond girl Motiari who is accused of being a witch. "...each of its chapters carrying an epigram on the persecution of witches in medieval Europe to remind its readers that their superstitions were once just as absurd". (Guha: 112)

Soon after these novels, Bengali novelist B. B. Bandopadhyay published his novel *Aranyak* (Of the Forest) in 1939. The scene of the novel is in the forest of South Bihar (now Jharkhand) where a young man from Calcutta works as a supervisor. He is in charge of clearing the forest and distributing land among the local people. Initially, the forests filled him with fear and revulsion. But as time passed his fears and revulsion gradually gives way to romantic longing and finally leads to a mystic experience in which he finds solace in the belief that man cannot destroy nature completely. Caught in this destructive process are the simple forest-dwellers who are gradually edged out of their habitat by unscrupulous merchants. This novel is an expression of a nostalgic longing for the simplicity and purity of the primeval state.

With the growing Indian English novel, few writers have continued to feature the Tribal in their works. Kamala Markandaya's sixth novel *The Coffer Dam* (1969) portrays a tribal village life where the tribals are forced to vacate their traditional village which was more sustainable. Their traditional village is a site where a dam was to be constructed by the government by two British engineers, Howard Clinton and Mackendrick who intend to build a big dam to control and channelize a turbulent river. The tribals are forced to leave their village which invariably impacts their lives in various ways. Bashiam is a skilled technician who comes to work at the dam. In spite of his skills he is looked down upon by Clinton because he hails from a tribal community, and is therefore despised. His wife Helen and his co-engineer Mackendrick however have a different attitude towards the tribals. Helen is impressed by the way of life of the tribals and their age old wisdom. She also gets to be intimate with Bashiam, but did not have the courage to leave her husband to be with Bashiam.

Arun Joshi's novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) is another novel that deals with the tribals. The novel he claims is to reveal that mysterious underworld which is the human soul. The novel can be perceived as a 'romantic' novel. The protagonist Bimal Biswas alias Billy is a young and intelligent man. He had always been haunted by some primitive force and his interest in the tribals made him study anthropology in the USA. He later taught in Delhi University, when finally he left his career and family and disappeared without a trace.

Ten years later, his friend Romi who had become a district collector finds him in a tribal village in Maikala hills completely at one with the people there and their way of life. He had abandoned the materialistic and tiresome city life to live a simple life amongst the tribals where he falls in love with a tribal woman Bilasia, and married her

according to the tribal custom. He feels no compulsion to return to his wife in the city for he has found a kind of spiritual regeneration in the forest amongst the tribals. The novel makes a comparison between the two women characters. Bilasia represents the tribal woman and the free spirit that is part of her nature. She is fond of dancing and drinking, she loves ornaments, and she is simple and hospitable, self-dependent as well as self-sacrificing. Besides being beautiful and virtuous, she is also found to be quite intelligent. Meena represents the city woman who is steeped in the realities of the civilised modern world.

Geeta Mehta's novel *A River Sutra* (1993) provides space to describe a tribal village called Vano, which is situated on the banks of the Narmada River. Near this village is a rest house where Nitin Bose, an executive in Calcutta's oldest tea company comes to stay for a few days. His encounter with a tribal woman Rima leads him to deeper intimacy. He becomes utterly possessed of her charms for she seemed to have strange and mysterious powers, which drive him to near madness. The tribals from the village helped him by offering prayers to the goddess in the jungle, who have the ability to cure madness. The tribals' mysterious knowledge helped Nitin to recover from his troubled soul. The novel depicts the tribals as fierce as well as selfless people and as still cut off from mainstream living retaining their strange and primitive knowledge that can heal troubled souls. It is a knowledge that the civilised world has forgotten.

Representation of the Tribal in these imaginative novels can be traced to the Western concept of *Primitivism*. The Western concept of *Primitivism* began as a glorification of a former golden age, and adapted other meanings as well. It also meant an idealisation of the childlike in mankind, and for the artist it often meant a return to simpler life and also in a cruder sense a valorisation of the sexual freedom supposed to

exist in so called 'primitive' societies. A spirit of nascent romanticism is attached to this concept. Central to this is the notion that the primitive peoples who live closer to the primeval reality of nature are uncorrupted by civilisation. *The Bible* has also portrayed a significant influence on such thinking since the Garden of Eden portrayed a powerful image of an idyllic earthly paradise before the fall of Man. In the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* too, the classical heroes often take refuge in the forests where they find peace and tranquillity away from the battle grounds.

The idea of the primitive man's nobility had been suggested by many European thinkers and writers since the 16th century, such as Montaigne as well as Rousseau. Such writers developed the cult of the *Noble Savage* whose ideal, prototypical character was later used by the 19th century Romantic writers as part of their reaction against what they saw as a decadent materialist culture endangered by the Industrial Revolution. The Primitivist writer tends to glorify the 'lost innocence' of a mythical, often pre-civilised state of well-being. He is anti-civilisation, anti-materialism, anti-industrialism, anti-progress and pro-Nature.

The discipline of anthropology is supposed to be based on objective research and empirical evidence, while literature is supposed to be born out of an imaginative desire to believe in an alternative way of life. This outlook sets a dichotomy between the 'romantic' and the 'realistic'. Such a trend was added to the 'civilised' world's view of 'primitive other' which still persist in many representations of such societies. Such is what is found in the Indian English novels that are mentioned. The tribal world that is portrayed in these novels is pictured as a mysterious peripheral world somewhere in the remote forests. The Tribal is endowed with some ancient knowledge system, filled with magic and spell unknown and mysterious to the civilised world.

These novels also depict relationships that are a meeting between two cultures – one the 'primitive' culture and the other the 'civilised'. In such relations that are developed between two societies the unknown exotic 'otherness' is always emphasised and the body of the 'other' becomes a ground where two civilisations merge. Sometimes it is a self-realisation as between that of Billy and Bilasia in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. Sometimes such union is a breach over a community, which becomes a ground for contestations and conflict between two cultures, as in the case of Phulmat's one night stay in the Punjabi business man's house in *Phulmat of the Hills* or Jili's living with the Sahukar which angers the men in her family in *Paraja*. Sometimes the nudity of the Tribal woman is gazed with lustful eyes by the outsider, as the forest guard's lustful gaze of the women taking bath in a stream in *Paraja.*

In the early stages of independent India, Elwin as a voice for the tribes was given recognition by the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. In November 1954, he appointed Elwin as Tribal Advisor for Tribal Welfare to the administration of the North Eastern Frontier (NEFA), based in Shillong. Elwin was assigned the task of implementing the tribal welfare programmes particularly in the north-east India.

Nehru became very popular for his pro-tribal policy. His statement that the tribal problems should be viewed in their context, as the tribal economy cannot be separated from cultural disposition and sovereignty, was a marked point. Nehru showed his love for the tribals and he felt that they were more disciplined than many of the other groups of people in the country. With an egalitarian structure of living, according to him, they were more democratic than many communities in India. However, according to his critics, Nehru had different ideas regarding the tribes of the north-east states and the tribes of other parts of India and his views were seen as prejudiced.

Nehru had also taken the advice of other Indian anthropologists of the time. He believed that tribal and caste society in India assumed no structural difference. Whatever the difference that is visible is the result of the settlement of these people in two different time periods in the history of Indian civilisation. He saw tribal problems from a broader historical perspective. He blamed colonial ethos for purposefully segregating the tribals into a separate entity from mainstream Indian civilisation.

Elwin on the other hand, did not agree on any coherent history of the people of India. He felt that Indian history generated by caste Hindus failed to make any favourable contribution to the well-being of the tribals. According to Elwin, tribal history is rather a story of economic exploitation and cultural destruction by caste society. He believed that it was the colonial rulers and Hindu moneylenders and landlords who uprooted the tribes from their indigenous productive system and put them into the peasant productive network. It was from this that they could neither rise up tothe scale of mainstream economic growth nor go back to their subsistence-based primitive production. Elwin thus advocated tribal self-government with minimum interference, other than medical.

Nehru saw tribal poverty on materialistic grounds while Elwin saw that tribal poverty is not only the epitome of material deprivation, but also the lapse of human compassion. It is to be noted that except for short visits as Prime Minister, Nehru did not have as much ground reality as Elwin did. However both Nehru and Elwin have contributed immensely to the Tribal discourses that followed Indian independence. There may have been major drawbacks in both of their approaches towards the tribals but

> At the same time, they left enormously valuable feedback for the tribal policy for the 21st century in that they showed that neither complete isolation nor large-scale and sophisticated development programme minus tribal participation was feasible (Rath: 86).

After independence, Indian Forest policy did not change the existing policies which had been implemented by the colonisers and which continue to be carried out from within the rank and file of political parties that continue to exploit the tribals in the rural areas.

According to many sociologists of today, India's ambition in placing itself at the level of developing countries was unmindful of native villagers and tribals. Development by industrialisation is replete with horrifying stories. The tribals who had managed to somehow survive under the feudalistic agriculture system were suddenly uprooted from their homes and relocated elsewhere without drinking water or sanitary provision. Many died in the process. The gross mishandling of certificates, compensations and loss of lands are stories behind such developments. Poverty, dirt and hunger make the Tribal contemptible to the outsider who gains in status by such developments. Further, being displaced from his knowledge system and without the written script the Tribal cannot define himself, his culture or identity.

Sajal Basu in his article " Ethno-Regionalism and Tribal Development" (2006) takes up Pashupati Mahanto's new term '*Nirbakaisation'* of the indigenous people, which denotes a process of submergence of identity and cultural violence caused by the Brahmanical hegemony. *Nirbak* is the Sanskrit word for silence, and *Nirbakaisation* is the process of cultural silence. (143). Mahanto had written,

> "...the lower ladder of the *jati-varna* in caste/tribal ethnic groups were continuously culturally silenced by the social, religious, political elites of Indian society through systematic cultural violence since ages" (18)

According to him tribals have been so submerged by dominant cultures that they are left to feel awkward to define themselves or to speak in their mother tongue and are forced to

think and act according to idioms, symbols, signs and style of the dominant groups. Basu, invariably sees the need to reconstructing native history. He coins a native Jharkhandi song:

Kato rakto bohi gela
Kato lok jiban dela
Kato manushola ujar he
Balo hey Mahajan
Itihase ki likha ache he.

{So much blood (of tribes) has been shed, so many precious lives sacrificed, so many lost their existence. Hey Master, are these recorded in (mainstream) history? } (144)

In Ramachandra Joshi's book *Island of Deprivation* (1984), has expressed that it is ironic that the average educated Indian's approach towards the tribals and other oppressed groups who have been cut off from mainstream for ages is still fundamentally conditioned by feudal and colonial legacy. Also those who claim to be part of the mainstream view the tribals as subhuman beings who are incapable by birth to comprehend and learn anything new. Since the tribals and other oppressed groups lack inborn capability to know the forces operating around them, neither can they solve their problems, nor can they determine the course of their development and progress. This he says is the general theory always propagated by the semi-feudal colonial value-ridden intellectuals and planners. The truth, he claims is the opposite.

Through the various exercises he conducted in various labour camps Joshi made them speak about their conditions. They expressed that there is no distinction between man and animal and that the poor man is hunted down like an animal by his enemies. They could identify their enemies such as police, businessmen, the tahsildar and other big governmental functionaries, advocate, doctor, bank manager, contractor, village sarpanch, mukhia, zamindar, shop keeper, money lender, tailor, bus conductor and some

even mentioned god and wife. Later, veterinary doctor, malaria inspector, ministers were added to the list.

As internal enemies they identified illiteracy, weakness, lack of organisation, inferiority complex, lack of unity, submissiveness, too many children, laziness, expensive feasts, drinking, wasteful expenditure, lack of nourishing food, theft within the community, witchcraft, superstition and tattooing. Later the following were also included such as mutual quarrel, greed, anger, dirty thoughts, opium, pledging and selling ornaments to buy ration, indebtedness, veneral diseases, T.B., malaria, polygamy and so on.

As one goes through the list of the enemies that the tribals and the marginalised have identified it includes the whole governmental machinery. Those whom they come in contact with are all identified as enemies. One is reminded of what Elwin had written in his pamphlet *The Aboriginals* in 1943

> ...I advocate, for the aboriginals a policy of temporary isolation and protection, and for the civilized neighbours a policy of immediate reform. If you want to help the aboriginal, do not try to reform him: reform the lawyer, the doctor, the schoolmaster, the official, the merchant, with whom he has to deal. Until that is done, it is far better to leave the aboriginal alone... (qtd by Guha: 169)

After decades of independence, mainly after the 1970s, representations of the Tribal by various social thinkers and imaginative writers alike on tribal issues have tended to become quite disturbing, particularly in the wake of large amounts of money being poured into tribal development programmes, steps taken to de-notify some tribal groups and reservations made in jobs. It is true that many have benefitted but that it also does not reach the majority. The ‘assimilation’ policy can be said to have failed as many tribal groups express their distinctiveness, identity and indigenity which has resulted in

the carving of many newly created states. The Tribal does not see himself moving on with the developmental programs made for him. He sees no post about his colonialism, as post-independent India in creating its own centre has successfully created its own 'internal others'.

What is to be noted is that the Indian English novel writers have continued representing the Tribal in the romantic mode. These writers are usually from the educated elite who do not know the tribals as well as the regional writers who live closer to them and can understand their language. The romantic trend in representing the Tribal by the urban elite also shows that the urban population still view the Tribal as a mysterious being different from others, possessing strange knowledge unknown to the civilised world. Tribals to them are peripheral beings who live somewhere out there in the jungles. The primitive/civilised bianary still continues to be the representations seen in the Indian English writers' representations.

The tradition by ethnographers and literary writers in essentialising the concept of the Tribal by emphasising the traits of the tribal personality which were seen as different from the non-tribal personality also continued. The Tribal's physiognomy, his animalistic practices, his 'violent' nature, his nakedness taken as sexuality or sensuality was continued. Literary representations taken up along such lines routinely essentialised the Tribal character. Sexuality was linked with their nakedness and missionaries and reformers alike took pains to clothe them. Others like Verrier Elwin found beauty in their nakedness and believed that trying to clothe them brought drabness to their culture as well as destroying the free spirit of the tribes. Some novelists took this attitude by portraying this nakedness as sexuality but one which is innocent and uninhabited at the same time.

The supposedly violent nature of the Tribal which had been repeatedly essentialised emerged out of ethnographers who had often given descriptions of his animistic practices that often involved the killing of wild animals for sacrifices, and this was interpreted as 'Devil-worship' which carried implications of strange rituals and gruesome human sacrifices. Such kinds of writings posit the Tribal as the quintessential pagan who worships the Devil by offering terrible sacrifices, engaging in witchcraft and the evil eye. The Tribal's rituals are thus denigrated to magic. The practice of head-hunting which used to be practiced by some tribes especially of the north-east captured the imagination of many without a real understanding of the process and meaning of the practice.

In many a fictional narrative, the extraordinary courage of the Tribal is also highlighted, especially of his courage in fighting wild animals. The valour of the Tribal in his efforts to resist his persecutors is also highlighted. In such instances, the Tribal is seen as noble, valiant and disciplined. The violence of the Tribal is also linked with exploitation by a hostile outsider or a civilised world wherein such situational violence becomes a form of resistance to an alien culture which clashes with the Tribal's own value systems.

It is through the translations of regional texts into English that one gets to see a more realistic representation of the Tribal, for the regional writer can express deeper thoughts of the Tribal in his closer proximity with the Tribal. India is also in the process of understanding that 'integration' does not mean the absorption of smaller cultures by a bigger one. Understanding each other's culture, literature and tradition help us understand the 'other'. And this is done through translation. There are also misgivings about oral traditions of oral cultures being translated into texts, that it destroys the

authenticity of the original is one misgiving. However, it is important to document these narratives into one form or the other before they disappear wholly.

In recent years as translations into English of regional literatures have taken a serious turn, many theories too have evolved. Simi Malhotra in her essay "Translating power: Empire, Language and the Postmodern condition" (2008) highlights the basis of Foucault's essay "Archaeology of knowledge*"* (1969) wherein Foucault argues that 'commentaries' have the potential to question and destabilise the potential fixities of discourse, by exposing that there are points that still remain unsaid in a text even though the discourse may have given the impression of being a coherent whole. He also points out that 'translation' is one of the subversive means that constitute the basis of this disruptive instrument. Accordingly, 'commentaries' try to uncover that deeper meaning of speech, that which had not been uttered. That to 'comment' is to admit by definition an excess of the signified over the signifier, and while questioning the signifier give voice to a content that was not signified. That commentary rests on the postulate that speech (parole) is an act of 'translation', which has the dangerous privilege images have of showing while concealing as well.

Through this idea of translation as 'commentary', translation has the power to reveal more than what the actual text reveals; translation has within it a certain subversive potential. It can destabilise discourses by bringing it face to face and confront with the Other. This is the disruptive potential of translation and its dual relationship with power. And this is why one cannot put aside translation as a tool of imperialism only. It has also become a powerful tool for resistance. Through translation the side lined regional texts is transformed into the master narrative, making it transparent and realistic for the Other who does not have the realistic knowledge of his other except through

imagination. Translating is a power itself as the translator through his work can represent a still small voice. For example, *Paraja* which was written by Gopinath Mohanty in Oriya in 1945, is opened out to the readers of English worldwide with Bikram Das's translation in 1990. The novel will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

With translations underway, many north-eastern tribal literatures are also being translated. With the location being remote from other parts of India, these translations bridge gaps between the area and mainstream India. For translation is not just translating from one language to another, it translates a culture as well helping readers to understand a culture that is not one's own.

The tradition of documenting folk literature which is being revived in small attempts also bring to light unknown oral traditions that can be clues to a people's history. Through the collection of documented and translated texts of tribal literature, G.N. Devy's published book *Painted Words: An Anthology of Tribal Literature* (2002) represents the Tribal by the collection of translations of oral traditions. Devy notes that the characteristic of the Tribal show very little interest in accumulating wealth or in using labour as a device to gather interest and capital. They accept a worldview in which nature, man and God are intimately linked, and they believe in the human ability to spell and interpret truth. They live more by intuition than by reason, and their sense of time is personal rather than objective. The world of the tribal imagination, therefore, is radically different from that of modern society.

Representations of the Tribal found in literary and non-literary works as of today, have become more disturbing. The primordial forests and the idyllic lives of the tribals have long disappeared to accommodate so called dream developments. Unless it is a romantic recollection of the past, presently in the domain of sociology and literary

representations alike, representations of the Tribal carry moods of resurgence and resistance especially to outside forces influencing the Tribal's culture and exploiting their lands resulting in their destruction of their livelihood of a given location.

In the Afterword of Mahasweta Devi's translated works *Imaginary Map* (1993) Spivak has even suggested the existence of a 'Fourth World' that includes all dispossessed tribes and aborigines across the globe:

> By "Fourth World" is meant the world's aboriginal people who were literally pushed to the margins for the contemporary history and geography of the world's civilizations to be established (211).

Spivak has invariably placed the tribes of India in a global context even as in recent years voices of Subaltern historians as Ranajit Guha and Ashis Nandy and social thinkers have opined that dominant history has been constructed and written by the educated elite of the moment for many social, political and economic histories of the past have tended to ignore the participation of the subaltern groups in historical processes.

Language in Marxist theory is a social phenomenon and one aspect of language is thatit is connected to class struggle, in the discourse of ideology - "differently oriented accents intersects in every ideological sign. [The] Sign becomes an arena of the class struggle" (Vlosinov: 280). Mahasweta Devi in her article "Tribal language and Literature: The Need for Recognition" (1987) included in her activist writing highlights that no tribal language has been recognised even when a large number of people speak the language. She gives a chart of the number of people who speak different tribal languages that are still not recognised and compares the number to that of the recognised ones as per the current statistics then. As example she cites that the unrecognised languages of Chhatisgarhi is spoken by 66, 93,445 and Santhali is spoken by 36, 93,558

people. While recognised languages of Kashmiri is spoken by 24, 21,760 people and Sindhi is spoken by 12, 04,678 people. (111)

Right from the beginning of her career as a writer, Mahasweta Devi was preoccupied with creating a new sense of history which rejects the history written by the elite especially where there are no records of any tribal participation in nationalistic movements. Her fictional works are mainly documented realism from the experiences that she had gathered through her extensive fieldwork as a social activist particularly around Purulia, Medinipur and Palamau. She writes an alternative history wherein the main players are the marginalised of society - tribals, dalits, peasants, women and so on. To document their history she often makes them speak out their memories and utilised their rich storehouse of oral literature.

As a contemporary writer at home and abroad Mahasweta Devi has set a different turn in her representation of the Tribal. In her interview with Gabrielle Collu on 11th February 1997, Collu asked her why people of America know so little about the tribes of India and why so little has been mentioned about the tribes of India and their plight. She replied, "Because others do not write about them...I wouldn't say no one ever wrote anything, but not my way" (Sen: 223). In the introduction to *Bitter Soil* (trans.1998) she voices her anger at the present system which she calls feudalism which is anti-poor, anti-woman and anti-children. She writes that she believes in documentation, and that she has based her writings on the truth. To Collu, she says of her writings as thus:

> I don't understand theory much but this I understand. I am Left. I will remain Left. No party or nothing and I haven't read any theory. I always say that all I have read is man. I have seen him, I have known him, and out of that I have written my stories and now so many theories are coming out of it (222).

Her novels, *Aranyer Adhikar* (1977),*Bashai Tudu* (trans. 1990), *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* (trans. 2002) to name a few, are based on the history of the tribes of Chhotanagpur area, the Mundas, the Kols and the Santhals. She writes about the parallel history of the tribals and their struggles against outward influences that has threatened their culture. In *Aranyer Adhikar* she depicts the tribal hero Birsa Munda (a historical figure) who had led a peasant struggle against the British alongside with the concept of the Munda struggle of 'land as identity'. In *Chotti Munda and His Arrow,* Dhani who was a fellow prisoner of Birsa and his staunch follower believes as Munda custom that a diety is always reborn. For him Birsa is a god a *bhagawan* and connecting Birsa with Chotti, belives that Chotti is a reincarnation of Birsa. In *Bashai Tudu,* her protagonist is created out of several real leaders of the Naxalite movement such as Jangal Santal, Gunadhar Murmu, Leba Chand Tudu and Rabi Manjhi. Bashai is a tribal leader who grows into a myth, who dies at every encounter with the police to be reborn for the next encounter. Bashai Tudu's movements become an extension of several actual peasants' movements, as the Hat Tola movement, the Hajong movement and the Tebahanga movement. Devi sets aside the Tribal from the mainstream Naxalite movement in which Bashai sometimes mingle with but runs a parallel tribal movement. In *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, the tribal resistance continues with Chotti's leadership.

These novels are fictionalised documented facts of important tribal uprisings - the Birsa Ulgulan of 1894 – 1901 and Santhal involvements in the Naxalite movement of West Bengal, between 1967 and 1973. The Tribal's resistance in the novels are documented by Mahasweta Devi through the stories collected from collective consciousness. The stories gathered may contain factual inaccuracies. As legends told by the folks carrying communal value inscriptions, they are also part of myth.

> As a continuing narrative which all members of the community could exaggerate to, these tales have an improvisatory, participative character in which communal memory is constantly re-performed to include the immediate with the historical, the individual with the mythical (Sen: 31).

Thus, as she writes the parallel history of the Tribal, she brings out the problematic relationship of history and literature. History is supposed to be factual, and literature of the imagination. But in such texts that are mentioned identifying the 'factual' and the 'fictional' brings out the differencial uses of history, and the question that arises is how the novel form can match the authority of history. Utilising the ethnographic novel technique of representation becomes a useful method of narrative production in these novels, for in the ethnographic technique, oral literature is considered as an important devise in tracing a people's history. The ethnographic technique finds the need to document these texts. In the novels that have been mentioned, the ethnographic and the contemporary mode of documented realism are merged to create a parallel history.

Thus, Mahasweta Devi has managed to evolve a new paradigm in the representation of the Tribal. She has broken the set norms of representation of Indian novelists who continued to essentialize the tribals as anthropologists tended to do earlier.

Treatment of nakedness of the Tribal's body is entirely different with Mahasweta Devi. Though she often sees it as beautiful, she does not eroticise it, nor see it as some mysterious element. Sometimes this nakedness is trope with empowerment. As in her short story *Draupadi* (trans. 1990), her heroine Draupadi the Santhal woman is arrested during an army operation against the Naxalites and is inhumanly tortured and gang raped and as result she remains publicly naked of her own will which intimidates the Senanayak. This is the weapon she wields against the people who tormented her. It becomes a reminder of the exploitation the tribals are subjected to as in *The Witch*

(trans.1998). The witch is believed to be the cause of the famine raging around the tribal area. If caught she must be stoned to death. The 'witch' turns out to be Somri, the lost mute daughter of the Munda chief, who had been raped by the son of the same Brahmin priest who had started the witch scare. Nakedness here is a reminder of exploitation and suffering.

As mentioned earlier though Devi too glorifies the tribal body she does not eroticise it like representations made by other writers. Mention of dances, courtship, rituals and erotic nudity are conspicuously absent from her writings. The Tribal's body is dark, healthy, virile and beautiful. In *Bashai Tudu,* Bashai's body is also beautiful, though this is not articulated, it is certainly implied. When Kali Santra is confronted with Bashai's mutilated body for the third time, a fierce anger possesses him. He is reminded of "that picture of Michealangelo's 'Pieta' in some book – the dead Jesus, in his youthful flawless body, lying in the lap of an exquisitely beautiful Mary. A human body can be so beautiful" (113). While finding the grave of the fifth Bashai, Kali Santra wonders how the sixth Bashai looks:

> The night the sixth Bashai buried the fifth and left – how did he look? Let him be very beautiful. Very young. Very dark, very beautiful, very young. (148)

From this image of a beautiful body, another image of it being of it being systematically mutilated is derived. This mutilation of the beautiful body becomes a metaphor for the destruction of beauty, of innocence, of the human spirit. At each death, the mutilation of Bashai's body is inevidently repeated. It almost becomes a symbolic ritual which must be repeatedly performed. The first time he dies, his body is riddled with bullets, in the second instance, his face and abdomen are torn open by bayonet, in

the third instance, his body is lashed to a tree and shot at, and his bones crushed under military boots. The fourth time round his body is swollen purple and shining with gangrene. The same image of the beautiful body being mutilated gets repeated as in the case of Draupadi. This image also serves to emphasise the sadistic element underlying legalised violence. In her short story *Little Ones* (trans.1998) Mahasweta Devi portrays the exploitation of the Kuva Agarias' through their shrunken deformed bodies in their 'naked' deformity. Though she represents the Tribal's body as beautiful she does not romanticise it but provokes its primitive beauty to draw haunting images.

The Tribal's fury has often been represented by anthropologists to be reflected in literary works. In the novels *Paraja* and *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, the Tribal's fury is never allowed to pose a serious threat to the exploiting 'outsider' because violence that is portrayed of the Tribal ultimately gets reduced by a self-destroying act. In Mahasweta Devi's representation, the Tribal's fury becomes a sort of solution and almost sanctioned, for she saw the necessity of it. It does not however seem to be expressed with as strong solidarity in the works of Gopinath Mohanty and Arun Jhosi.

Elwin was criticised for supposedly giving sanction to various evil practises of the tribals, and even wanted to protect some practises. Mahasweta Devi does not spare such evil practices. In her article "Witch-Hunting in West Bengal: In Whose Interest?" (1987), she condemns the witch-hunting practise going on in the tribal areas. But she also saw the other side of it. She believes that since everything that the tribal owns has been taken away they want to retain what they can, no matter how negative. She believes that by being deprived of education, and their culture is threatened by the vulgar onslaught of *jatra* culture.

> The political process has created an exploitative class within them, who flex their muscles as mafia dons. Ancient social mores are being eroded. The dowry system, earlier non-existent, has entered tribal life. Their languages are denied recognition. In numerous written histories of India, there is no reference to the countless tribal uprisings against the British imperialists. Neither the centre nor the state gives any award for tribal language and literature. They have been kept as museum pieces. In such a dismal scenario, it is natural for them to think that the witch-cult is something which truly belongs to them, something their own. Why should they have to lose everything? That is why they have embraced the cult with a new vigour; to preserve their identity...This explanation is entirely mine (167 – 8).

In the realm of Sociology, social scientists have also turned their attention towards present social stratification in the Indian context. This has continued the assimilation/isolation policy but in different ways. For, total assimilation without human compassion or total isolation is not workable. Social scientists have proposed that proper education works best for the marginalised for a healthy integration with other people, rather than trying to develop tribal areas with huge funds that does not really reach the people targeted. Education and its implementation in tribal areas thus becomes an important issue. Pratibha Ray takes this up in the context of the Bondo inhabitant, in her novel *The Primal Land* which will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

The representation of the Tribal from pre- colonial texts that had portrayed him as a beast or a ghost has made him to be viewed with fear and seen as the 'other'. He was further humiliated as colonial ethnography emulated this paradigm from the ancient puranas, added to which was the civilising mission of the west. Post-colonial India for the last many years paid little attention to the marginalised tribal communities. In some cases the Tribal's plight has grown worst in an independent India. Disrupted and alienated from the land he used to own, weaned away from the forest's subsistence but unable to attain the tools to modern progressive living, he becomes easy prey

exploitation. The ethnographic novels to be studied in the preceeding chapters open out many issues that help to understand the Tribal and the predicaments he faces during colonial and post-colonial times that have disrupted his traditional way of life.

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Chapter 3:

Ethnographic Novels: Representing the Tribal in *Phulmat of the Hills: A Tale of the Gonds* and *Paraja*

This island is mine, by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak'st from me.

- Calliban (*The Tempest* Act I: Scene II)

A narrative is valued for various reasons, as stated earlier it may be its linguistic formation, its aesthetic value, or its social content and so on. An ethnographic fiction will be valued for its ethnographic content, which mainly is a representation of a people, and their way of life. For as discussed in earlier chapters, culture and tradition being dynamic can go through change, get hybridized or disappear wholly, while documented narratives that represent a people who may have changed their pattern of life remains – call it a treasure or a parallel history, for such narratives can be answers to questions we pose in the present. As discourses on indigenous peoples are linked to disintegration of traditional way of life and alienation from their cultures, memory plays an important role. For such people the narratives that represent their ways of life act as memory – that links the present with the past.

Historical dialogues may seem more real to us, but they do not give details to individual narratives especially so when a person belongs to a community, the 'subaltern' or one that is 'ahistorical' or a community that lives outside history or at the periphery. A writer of ethnography does the job of retaining a memory. Whether his account is well written or not, he is instrumental in giving an identity to a people, either to be agreed with or to be contested. His documents either in the scientific mode or the subjective and

sensitive mode will give answers to questions in the present that we pose upon a people. In an age of reader's response, the fictional form of ethnographic narrative has become a popular form of representation than the scientific mode for various reasons. Though ethnography can be represented through varied ways, the novel form proves to be a convenient method of representation in its polyphonic character and the wide space it provides for detailed information.

In a fictionalised version of ethnography, persons or characters are personalised and remain in the memory as we become more familiar with them and their ways in dealing with their everyday lives in their own social spaces that may be unfamiliar to our ways of dealing with life and our understanding of it. Through the author's representation and his artistic expression we feel closer to people whom we never knew or understood nor are familiar with. In a fictionalised ethnography the writer through his factual encounters draw characters, events, actions and locations which he fictionalises into a narrative, to represent a people. Reasons for the ethnographer to resort to writing in the fictional form or an author resorting to give truthful and detailed ethnographic accounts as any fieldworker theorist would do may differ according to the individual writer.

As noted in the first chapter, in a fictionalised form of narrative, the identity of individuals or informants whom the writer had known personally can be made anonymous by fictionalising them into characters. Individual emotions and feelings can find spaces in a fictionalised narrative as do landscapes and their aesthetic and spiritual influences can. The innate human desire for story-telling and listening which is a part of human existence even before scripts were acquired is still a part of life. The ethnographic fiction manifests the discreet desire of the ethnographer to become an author or a story-teller or on the other hand the author's discreet desire to give truthful ethnographic

accounts. According to James Clifford in *The Predicament of Culture* (1996) "The fashioned fictional self" that "fashions an identity authorized to represent, to interpret, even to believe – but always with some irony – the truths of discrepant worlds" (94) can be a discreet presence in a fictional form, for the writer may wish to account his own feelings and thoughts through his characters. The list can go on.

While making a long and detailed comparison of Conrad and Malinowski, Clifford further says that the two writers in their route to become English writers have "offered a paradigm for ethnographic subjectivity" which has enacted "a structure of feeling continuously involved in translation among languages, a consciousness deeply aware of the arbitrariness of conventions, a new secular relativism" (Clifford:94) and this has composed cultural subjectivity with their own version of 'On Truth and Lie in a cultural sense'(Nietzsche's term) of which Nietzsche more than Tylor had been influential to the process of the relativist idea of culture. Both Conrad's and Malinowski's works have also been instrumental in deviating from the traditional notion of the term 'culture' which used to be regarded as a single evolutionary process as was the belief of European bourgeois. To this process of writing about cultural subjectivity, one can say that Verrier Elwin adds still another dimension, which is a more intense and personal participation to his cultural subjectivity, the tribes of India. He was instrumental in setting in the romantic trend with deeper emotional feelings attached to his representations of the tribes of India.

Elwin's life is an ambiguous one. Brought up in a strict Anglican Christian family, after graduating in literature from Oxford, he followed the path of the traditional church and prepared himself to become a Christian priest like his father. He came to India as a missionary, but his association with Gandhi made him decide to serve the down trodden

of society. He decided to work for the tribals of India, and during his contact with them he became personally involved in their lives and gave up his religion. He was instrumental in changing the then stereotyped images of representing the tribals that was prevalent at the time in India. His intense love for the people he came in contact with, and by changing the scientific object to a subjectivised one he set a new trend in representing the Tribal. The prevalent notions of the tribals which had greatly influenced their identities took a different turn in his works. He notes in his autobiography that his attitude towards them was the influences of Gandhi and Tagore. Elwin writes in his autobiography thus,

> ..... There have always been two sides to me – one side, the world – renouncing, was captivated by Gandhi, but the other side of world - affirmation I found in Tagore. His belief in beauty, rhythm and colour, the fact so many people in India seemed to be afraid of and that he was not, awoke an enthusiastic response in my heart. 'He who wants to do good knocks at the gate; he who loves finds the gate open.' Everything about Tagore was positive, affirmative. He made life a work of art. He was interested in the tribal Santals and inspired by them. Indeed I have often felt that the tribal areas should be administered and their policies directed by poets and artists. (TWV: 340 - 341)

While writing ethnographies about the tribes of India, Elwin admits that he did not wish to begin in the style of the professional anthropologists with their dry scientific outlooks. That his interest in human beings is more intense which he said began with literature, and Jane Austin and Swift were his first teachers. It was also theology that had developed his interest in Man, for the science of God had led him to the science of Man. Elwin also believed that as anthropology is such a vast subject, there should also be anthropological writings by someone from the humanist background as himself.

> That there is nothing hostile to scientific inquiry in having an intense and affectionate interest in the people one studies, in desiring their progress

> and welfare and in regarding them as human beings rather than as laboratory specimens. (TWV: 141)

Such was his attitude when he began to write about the tribes he came in contact with. He also admits that

> One of the things that roused great suspicion among the pundits was that I came to anthropology through poetry. I still cannot see what was wrong with this. The chief problem of the student of man is to find his way underneath the surface; he has to 'dig' people. Poetry is the revealer, the unveiler; by heightening a man's own sensitivity, by opening to him the treasures of the imagination, it increases his powers of sympathy and understanding. And when his people are (as they were in the Maikal Hills) themselves poets by temperament, there is a link between him and them; they talk the same language, love the same things. (TWV: 143)

Thus it was through poetry that Elwin came to writing ethnography. After writing ethnographic accounts of the tribes he came in contact with, he tried his hand in writing fiction. As already put forward, fiction writing probably offered a wider space for relating personal thoughts and feelings through the characters that he had created, drawn from people he met. It is through his efforts that a few novels fromthe Indian soil began featuring the Tribal as protagonists. The novel which was beginning to find roots in the Indian soil had mainly used for its subjects the grandeurs of royalty and the British Raj during this time. His use of the Tribal as protagonist was followed by other novelists who started writing about rural life and rural people from different parts of India.

Among the novels that were written by Elwin only *Phulmat of the Hills: A Tale Of the Gonds* (1937) and *A Cloud that's Dragonish: A Tale Of Primitives* (1938) got published. The novel *Phulmat of the Hills*, as noted earlier is probably the first of its kind written in the Indian soil, for Bikram K. Das in the introduction to *The Primal land* had made a note that fictionalised anthropology is an established genre of which Elwin was a

noted exponent in the country. The Gonds were the first tribe that Elwin encountered and his aim to become an authority to represent them is revealed in his interview with *The Observer* where he is noted saying as thus,

> The aboriginal tribes are now in minority, and they have neither writers or politicians of their own. I am trying to establish myself as an authority, to get myself into a position where I can fight for their interests; otherwise they will be swamped by a very corrupt form of civilisation, not the finer side of Hinduism and Islam, but the exploiting greed which comes from the towns. (Guha: 107)

Phulmat of the Hills, is an ethnographic novel where the plot and the characters are all instrumental in representing the life of tribals who live in a remote area. With little contact of the outside world, the tribals live a pattern of life in the way they understand it. Elwin had already written about the Gonds in *Leaves from the Jungle* (1936), which is written in the form of a diary with a long prelude giving information about the tribals that Elwin encountered. Some of his characters like Panda Baba, Tutta and Phulmat who are portrayed in his novel *Phulmat of the Hills* are already mentioned in *Leaves from the Jungle*. Panda Baba, the *gunia*[1]*,* or the magician who had been mentioned, makes a cameo appearance in the novel. Although this novel may not be much read in India, it still remains one of the first few novels that feature and represent the Tribal in India. As many cultures in India are on the verge of disappearing, it will be such kind of ethnographic narrative which supplement oral culture that will preserve memory. Elwin describes the Gonds in his autobiography thus,

> …what is culture? Is it not something more than art, religion, language, tradition? There is a very true culture that depends mainly on character, and in this sense the Gonds are a highly cultured people. They have royal blood in their veins, and even the poorest and simplest of them has a strength of purpose, a dignity, a redeeming sense of humour, and a courage in face of the disasters of life that anyone envy. The honest peasant in his field, the

> elemental forces of Nature, is in this sense as truly cultured as the most sophisticated intellectual. (TWV: 105)

Phulmat of the Hills does not have a complicated plot nor is it replete with abstract philosophical thoughts and content. It is a simple story with a simple plot wherein the main character Phulmat, who is a village beauty, graceful, kind, a wonderful dancer and singer, is unfortunately smitten by leprosy. She becomes a victim of a hateful disease and is physically maimed and mentally broken, like many others around her who are living in a world afflicted by witchcraft, magic and diseases. Betrayed by her lover and thrown out of her home due to her unfortunate fate, she wanders about aimlessly and in the end is still unable to reconcile with her lover due to the leprosy that had destroyed her beauty.

The novel portrays a primordial uncomplicated life[2] of tribal villagers unexposed to the outside world, with its internal clan conflicts, internal contests of hierarchies, village rumours, love intrigues and betrayals, human bonds, where the poorest of the poor live side by side with the poor, where superstitions and diseases afflict the inhabitants. Though the plot may be simple and uncomplicated, within it are lived experiences of people as the story is interwoven with ethnographic accounts that are packed with information about the Gonds who lived in the Maikal Hills in this village called Mulmula.

According to Ramachandra Guha

> *Phulmat* is a tale of some ethnographic interest, held together by the focus on the fate of its central character. One reviewer, H.E. Bates, thought the book 'a piece of the best kind of romance, rich in emotion but unsentimental, rich in colour but firmly rooted in fact….realistic and as frank, in its portrayal of love, as Maupassant'. (Guha: 112)

And that the narrative

> …is replete with poems, riddles and stories put in the mouths of its characters, interspersed with straight dialogue. The tribals set great store by the artful telling of stories, good music and fine dancing, all activities at which the tragic Phulmat excel. (Guha: 111)

Elwin in a circular letter warned his friends in England that they might find the book "coarse and realistic. So it is. But it is no good trying to describe a primitive village as though it were a Brompton drawing room". The Gonds and Baigas, he said,

> ...are more or less absorbed in two things – food and sex – and their conversation is like the prose part of Shakespeare. So I want you to believe that *Phulmat of the Hills* is not pornographic but photographic. (Guha: 112)

Such an apologia of a statement reveals the fact that Elwin wished to represent his tribes to a so called European 'civilised' class of people possibly to dislodge the prevalent notions that the tribals are fearsome, subversive and perverse 'primitives' and 'savages'. For, the pictures that were presented of them were that they are naked savages, who ate almost anything, guzzled down large quantities of liquor, believed in spirit-worship and indulged in sexual orgies. Though Elwin's characters may not be savages, they are not always 'noble savages' either. For being subjected to everyday emotions, as human beings they also resort to greed and envy, possessiveness of lovers, jelousy and casting of spells.

To the apologia made by Elwin, Baral believes that it implies that

> …their situation cannot be redeemed, shows that Elwin, as a novelist is far from (Henry) James's concept of 'intensity of the impressions'…..Elwin has complicated his position as a novelist. If the conversations of the tribes Elwin has represented are like the 'prose part of Shakespeare' (not only in utterances, but also in syntactical formation), their linguistic ability then is highly developed! Sex and food are two important aspects of daily life. These two factors cannot be downplayed as obsessions, when considered from a host of other aspects such as economics of desire, psychology of characters,

> sociological implications of marriage and also value of love in a permissive society. (19)

The writings of anthropologists, missionaries and social reformers had attacked two of the tribal institutions on grounds of immorality. That of their dancing, which is a natural pattern of their lives, to outsiders is regarded as immoral for the connotations they carried and the licentiousness that are usually accompanied. Ghurye in fact suggested that mixed dancing should be stopped and only all male or all female dancing should be allowed. The other institution that had been often attacked is their dormitory-system wherein young unmarried boys and girls slept together and educated themselves for adulthood and the practice of sex. Elwin found beauty both in their dormitory-system and their rhythmic dancing and found these two institutions as a celebration of life, and he endlessly defended these institutions.

The dormitory system is common in most tribal societies. S. C. Roy, the lawyer-ethnographer from Ranchi was one of the first anthropologists to write about the dormitory system. He wrote about the *dhumkuria* system of the Oraons. Later, Elwin wrote about the *ghotul* system of the Muria tribe. Most 'outsiders' view this institution as a place of uninhabited sex, which is not fully true. The dormitory system functioned as a social unit, which trained or educated young boys and girls in their social duties which were important for the community as a whole. The sexual liaisons that occurred were incidental but not the main feature of the dormitory system.

For the man who had fiercely defended the dormitory system, surprisingly very few details are given of the dormitory life in *Phulmat of the Hills*. It only finds mention in connection with only information that Satula, as all members of the tribe had the experience of the dormitory life that had initiated her into adulthood and had prepared

her into the intricacies of life and her own sexuality. Still, one can have a fleeting glance of the dormitory life which prepares the inmates for their social duties, where the elder members teach the younger ones.

Elwin saw the dignity of the Tribal in sickness and poverty and respected it. Indeed the lives of the tribals, their behaviour and their manner of speech narrated in the novel, would be coarse in comparison with so called genteel social manners. For instance, Phulmat's art of cooking is so delicious that the villagers would steal from each other's plates and grab from the hands of others does not indeed fit into a Brompton Drawing room. Their manner of speaking and conversing with each other is by no means gentle and soft. Communicating with each other by shouting or what they call *gali* is taken as a matter of fact often accompanied with joviality. Disagreeing and voicing their opinions loudly and even expressing through action, is just a part of their lives. Amid all the quarrelling and fighting, the tribals have their own system of bonding and alleging their faithfulness to others. For instance, the incident of the bond of friendship tie between two characters in the novel, Gamira and Tiblu to become *jawar*, is done with a solemn rite and celebration accompanied with drinking and dancing accompanied with great noises.

> The *jawar* is one of the grades of Gond friendship, not so unique as the *mahaprasad* which is made only between the greatest friends, not so sacred as the *sakhi* which is a divine bond coming down from the sky, but yet a most intimate, lifelong association. Gond life is enriched by these and many other intimacies, solemnly entered upon, unbreakable, more lasting than the marriage tie, which traverse even the sternest tribal barriers. So that though Tiblu could not eat from Gamira's hands, he could be his *jawar*, and share almost everything in his life, except his food, his water and his pipe. (PH: 175)

The novel *Phulmat of the Hills* is photographic, beginning with a narration of a rare dance – the Serpent dance in which the whole community participates. The tribals have

different kinds of dances, and this particular one is an all male dance. The men dance in a line clutching each other desperately while the women and children watch with fear and excitement. Elwin's description instantly alert curiosity in the detailed ethnographic description which is 'photographic',

> It was the Serpent Dance, climax of the great Saila of the Gond tribe, a dangerous dance, one not often seen, for if the man at the head can catch and bite the man at the tail, his victim will die of the bite of a real snake within a year. It is always a long struggle. The head of the snake, drunk with wine and drugs, filled with the dark serpent power, leaps forward with demonic energy, dragging the body with him. The men behind hold him back as much as they can, but the others push them forward; everyone is drunk, and it is hard to estimate the movements of the unwieldy line. As the head comes round, the tail dashes violently to and fro. The people of the village stand by, half entertained, half fearful. (PH: 11)

Group dancing is a very common community occurrence for all tribes. Dances may be for ritualistic reasons, celebrations, and mourning for the dead or so on. Elwin's keen observation as an ethnographer is proved right from the start. The Snake dance which is a rare dance sets the novel in a mood of suspense and wonder. As the detailed description of the village follows the snake dance, the narrative takes on a more subjective mood as the writer's feelings become more involved with the people and the place which may not find as much space in a more scientific mode of ethnographic description. The narrative moves to alternate between the third and the first person, as the ethnographer as observer and the novelist with his own creative mind attach personal feelings that begin to mingle in the narrative. The brief history of the Gonds who had found refuge amongst these hills and jungles to escape from the onslaught of invading armies centuries back is revealed as the author stresses on the seclusion and purity of the village from influences of the

outside world. He rationalizes the world of the tribals which is a world shared by wild animals, with its witches, spirits, superstitious beliefs and black magic. For,

> Here live witches and every kind of ghosts; the tiger and the bear move freely in sheltered, half-forgotten glades; wild and naked tribesmen eke out a scanty living with roots and berries. But no one can forget the Maikal Hills; they are full of a holy magic that enchants with love and beauty. Their children cannot forsake these hills; however far away they wander they desire to return to them before they die (PH: 12).

In his attempt to represent tribal life and to make it more familiar, Elwin gives detailed family lineage, the various customs and institutions of the tribe for the benefit of those who hardly know of their existence nor any knowledge of the location and people who live entirely different lives from the west. In Mulmula the Pardhans live close to each other with an establishment of fourhouses. Julan, Gamira's uncle and his beautiful wife Satula and their children live in one and Phulmat and Gamira live in another. Phulmat the main character stands out from the rest of the villagers, not only in her physical beauty,

> …but for a difference of caste – she as a Pardhan, these were Gonds; she came of vagabond minstrel stock, they of respectable peasant families who had tilled the soil for centuries; she was temperamental, sensitive, an artist, while they were good and homely animals. (PH: 13).

Due to the type of family she comes from, apart from her beauty, her grace and her adeptness as a dancer is given in detail. In fact while very young, her father had given her the flesh of the kingfisher so that she would be as beautiful and graceful as the bird. In *Leaves from the Jungle* (1958) Elwin describes the Pardhans[2] and the Bhimas as offshoot of the Gonds who are devoted to music and dance. He describes the Pardhans in his autobiography as, "the charming and romantic minstrels who have preserved the Gond epics". (105)

According to David Mandelbaum,

> …most tribal peoples of India…live in hilly or forested terrain where population is sparse and communication difficult…within their villages and localities…most tribals have a strong sense of their distinctiveness and hold themselves to be quite separate from jati villages . (275)

The fictional narrative further proceeds to give elaborate ethnographic accounts, many of which Elwin had already accounted in his work *Leaves from the Jungle.* Detailed totem identity of the characters is given. For instance, the dreaded Bhuta who is a sworn enemy of the Pardhan household belongs to the Baria or cobra totem and throughout his life revered and protected snakes, and they in turn were bound to help him. He is swift and poisonous like the snake and in fact during the Serpent dance, with his swiftness he is capable of killing Gamira, who is not as swift as he is, for he belongs to the tortoise totem. The Snake dance becomes significant for the narrative of the novel as in the dance Bhuta bit Gamira, and the superstitious belief is that Gamira would die exactly one year after the incident. Bhuta in fact planned to kill Gamira but failed in his attempt. But just a year after the Serpent dance, the Gamira – Phulmat love story began to disintegrate.

Among the tribes or sub-tribes in India it is not uncommon that they are divided into different clans. According to Vidyarti and Rai (174-176), the clan organization is an important spherical ring in the tribal design. The primary social grouping of individuals rests on the family and their clan organization which extends its hands to the families to join in a somewhat broader grouping. The main elements of this structure are in substance major groupings of kinsmen. The nucleus of the tribal organization falls in the descent groups, which further gives rise to the organization of major descent. These

descent groups associate with some natural or imaginary objects and claim their ancestry on line. They disperse or localize to form commonness among themselves. This mainly regulates them in their marital ties which is the internal organization of the tribe. The clan can be defined as an exogamous division of a tribe, the members of which are held to be related to one another by some common ties, maybe belief in descent from common ancestors, possession of common totem or habitation of common territory.

Among Indian tribals clan organization is found in almost all the tribal groups and the majority of them are based on its totemic principle as totem occurs in wide areas of the tribal society. There is also the group which have no clan organization as such but who take help of territorial or far descendants and relatives or local groups in marital alliances. According to Mandelbaum,

> In tribal life the principal links for the whole society are based on kinship. Individual equality as kinsman is assumed; dependency and subordination among men are minimized. Agnatic bonds form the fundamental web, affinities are of lesser significance. Lienages or clans tend to be the chief corporate units; they are often the principal units for land ownership, for defense, for economic production and consummation. Each man considers himself entitled to equal rights with each other. (576)

The totemic clan of a particular tribal group assures it of being associated with a definite group of individuals set in certain relation to an animal, a plant, an object, or an animal. They are also named in such connection with which the view prevails that the members of this group cannot establish marital ties among themselves. The object after which the group is named must be respected. Thus, in the novel *Phulmat of the Hills*, Julan could not marry the sweetheart of his younger days since she belongs to the same clan.

Julan, Gamira's uncle belongs to the tortoise totem and it is his solemn duty not only to refrain from killing a tortoise himself, but if ever he saw a neighbour about to kill one, he must fall at his feet and offer him money or a plump chicken in its place. Phulmat belongs to the crocodile totem, and when once she heard that a crocodile had been killed, she broke all the earthen pots in her house, and fasted for a whole day. Similarly, Satula belonged to the Eti-Kumars, who do not kill or eat the meat of the goat. The myth behind this is that the founder of their clan had sacrificed a little boy to god *Bara Deo*; cut the body and hid it in a basket. The parents of the boy caught him and insisted on searching him. In his desperation he called on *Bara Deo* for help, and when the parents opened the basket, the boy had disappeared and they found only the dismembered limbs of a goat. Thus the Eti-Kumars never kill or eat the meat of the goat. Satula therefore would always beg the household to spare the goat, and would not enter the kitchen while the meat is being cooked.

In the novel, Elwin had gives a detailed description of the different households in Mulmula village where members of a clan live close to each other. He describes how the Pardhans decorated their home,

> …in front was this antechamber which was a sole entrance of the entire compound and had a strong ancient door, fantastically carved with elephants and monkeys. There were elephants on the walls too, done in mud, and in one place the splendid twelve-pointed head of a barasingha. (PH: 22)

Members of a clan stick to each other through thick and thin, and defend each other defiantly. The night Phulmat due to her leprosy was thrown out of her house by Gamira; she in her state of mental shock took shelter in the house of the Punjabi businessman but was unfortunately spied by Bhuta, while she was leaving the house of the Punjabi in the

morning. Among the tribes "one is never forgiven to go to a Punjabi, a Mussalman or a Christian". Phulmat, "herself would be out of the tribe for her whole life" (PH: 146). Phulmat's fate to be caught leaving the Punjabi's house meant that she should be put out of the tribe and to be punished openly for the act.

Many tribes have their own system of disciplining their wayward women. The tribals of Mulmula village are no exception and Phulmat is manhandled to meet an open punishment. The whole Pardhan household in solidarity comes out to fiercely defend her from public humiliation. They do not accept the fact that other clans should disgrace her. Amid the confusion and fierce fighting, Phulmat is forgotten and thus flees from the village, which further alienates her from her clan members and her village. Even in her expulsion and aimless wanderings, it is members of her clan in other parts who give her food and shelter. As for the villagers of Mulmula, due to the open fighting several members of the village had to be put out of the tribe and had to later purify themselves in different ways to be in the tribe again. Some of the men had to purify themselves for having allowed women to beat them in the fight. The woman whose hair Satula had torn must purify herself for Gonds should not be humiliated by Pardhans.

To be put out[4] of the tribe and to be purified and accepted back again in the tribe can be an expensive matter. It entails either a heavy fine or throwing a feast for all the members of the village. For, the poorest of the poor like Tutta, there is no way in which he could have retrieved his place in the tribe. Deformed and epileptic, he was put out of the tribe for being in the hospital at Bilaspur and eating food from the hands of the Christian nurse. However, Tutta is treated kindly by the Pardhan household. He was allowed to make a home in their colony near them, and he was often fed by them. He is liked by members of the village for his poetry and queer sayings. "Singing was his

greatest joy. When the pounding of the drums sounded in the night, he became a new man. He walked into the group of singers with conscious dignity, with the assurance of an artist" (PH: 71). It was Tutta who later ventured out in search of Phulmat and in trying to save her from the burning house was killed by the fire.

Magic and witchcraft play important roles in the social fabric of the tribals. The *gunia* or the witch doctor plays an important role in the life of the Gond village, and is respected. Panda Baba is the *gunia* of the village. He is short but intensely alive. He is shrewd, tactful, intelligent, an adept in the mysteries of the world of spirits. He is also the guardian of religion in Mulmula. For years he had enjoyed a lucrative and distinguished position as *gunia* of the village. His advice had been sought for in many things and he had helped many to recover from their illness and afflictions from unwanted ghosts. He was therefore not at all pleased when an old Baiga had begun to visit the village and many went to him for advice, including his own son Tok Singh.

Bhuta, the sworn enemy of the Pardhan household, who had tried to kill Gamira is viewed as a dark spirit of the other world. The story goes that Tiharu his ex-wife's mother who according to village whispers was believed to be a witch herself had cast a powerful spell on him. Magic is linked to their superstitious beliefs which are greatly linked to their psyche. According to Vidyarthi and Rai,

> Magic is an integral part of a religion of tribal dimension. It is said that magic is on par with the religion itself. Untoward natural events, inadequate technical means and situations full of danger and uncertainty lead to belief in the magical practices. (244)

In the novel, Bhuta possessed with frenzy in his obsession to kill Gamira really believed that the spirit of the power of the snake was upon him. He began to behave like one on the night he attempted to kill Gamira.When Satula did not get along with Adri,

she concocted a charm out of crow feathers and porcupine quills and hid it inside Gamira's house so that Gamira and Adri would be affected by the quarrel charm. Tiblu prepares a love charm to win Singaru; the charm is a mixture of the bone of a crane, dust from Singaru's footprint and dirt from his chest. Phulmat was possessed by the powers of the *churel* and became very sick but was saved by the *gunia* of the place she stayed. When Bhuta was killed by a tiger everyone believed that his spirit would be more dangerous after death. And all those who helped the victims of the tiger would have to confront the anger of the tiger's spirit. So the old Baiga, after conducting the funeral of Bhuta drove a nail on a large tree, and they all believed that the jaw of the tiger was thus sealed there.

Elwin does not give indepth explanation or eroticize the Tribal's body as a novelist with a keen observation would do. Neither does he give indepth analysis of facial features and expression. He instead uses the natural world to give expression to the physical, wherein the Tribal's body merges with the colour and moods of nature. Sometimes the Tribal's body is not beautiful as when it is maimed with sickness and diseases. Julan's body is deformed by leprosy, so too is Tutta with epilepsy and loss of an arm. Even the beautiful body of Phulmat follows the dreaded fate, maimed for lack of medical aid. Love and sex play an important role in the narrative of the novel but love making is not explained in detail. The tribes are at liberty to choose and change their partners, but this liberty is confined to the tribe only. In a comparison made between Malinowiski and Elwin, Guha mentions that

> ..the Pole was a dry-as-dust technician analyzing the sexual consciousness in terms of incest taboos and mother-right, the totemic organization of clans and the economy of wife-exchange. In his books the discussion of sex generalized rather than particular, with individuals subsumed for the most part in the grid

> of social structure. In contrast Elwin's account is animated and vigorous, illuminating through character and example (Guha: 113).

As an ethnographic novel, what a community does together is often highlighted. The narration of the activity of plucking and picking the fallen Mango fruits in the forest which is done together as a community is explained. The joys and fun that accompany the activity is not unnoticed by the writer. For the tribals, eating fruits from the jungles is a good source of their nourishment and barring them from the jungles means depriving them of this and other sources of nourishment.

Elwin to add lyricism and rhythm to the narration of the novel includes songs and depicts the ease with which they are sung, accompanied by the various activities. Singing comes naturally to the tribals and is often used as a means of communicating with each other.

> Gond poetry is simple and symbolic, free of all literary conventions and allusions. It is poetry of earth and sky, of forest, hill and river, of changing seasons and the varied passions of men, poetry of love, naked and unashamed, unchecked by any inhibition or restraint. The bulk of poems are songs of the dance and the most poetic of them perhaps are songs of the Karma dance which is common to many of the primitive tribes of the central India (TWV: 104).

Myths play important roles in tribal life, and very often they guide their thinking and perception of the world. The Gond kingdom had been destroyed and disintegrated centuries ago, and the Gonds had settled in various parts of India. Due to which their culture varies from area to area, but they are connected by their myths which identifies them wherever they had settled. Their language which is a Dravidian tongue is now used by half of their people.

> Their culture survives in their memories of the past, for they have an extensive mythology, in the legendary history of their old kings and heroes, and in the dance and song at which they are still experts (TWV: 104).

Myths take the role of reviving a community's memory as they are orally narrated and passed down from generation to generation. An important myth found in most tribal communities is the Creation myth, which varies from tribe to tribe. In Chapter IV of the novel, Elwin narrates through Panda Baba's words the Gonds' Creation myth, the beginning of Mankind and all the tribes.

> At first there was nothing but water, water, water. There was no voice of God, no voice of *bhut*, no wind, no rocks, no paths. As the sky is now, so was water then. God sat on a great lotus-leaf, drifting here and there on the waters. There was no fruit or flower to his life, he was all alone, like a house where a girl has died. So one day God began to rub his arm and a lot of dirt came off. He looked at the dirt, and he kneaded it a little, and moulded it a little, and at last made Karicag the crow. When he saw it could fly he said to it: 'Go and find some earth for me; I am lonely here; I want to make a world.' (PH: 54)

And the tale goes on to show how the crow, the tortoise, the worm, Bhimsen[5] the giant and Pawn Dassorie the Wind become instrumental in the creation of the Earth in the Creation myth of the Gonds. But of course the Baigas had their own version of the Creation myth, which differed a little from that of the Gonds.

Tribals have their own sense of religion, which is animistic in nature. Thus, they have different gods for different occasions and events. This is mentioned in the novel which reflects on their various purposes and the linkage to their myths. Even their drinks, an integral part of the tribals' lives are connected to their Creation myth. Bhimsen discovered liquor in the hollow of a mahua tree when he was lead by the hordes of birds that flocked together to enjoy drinking. He thoroughly enjoyed drinking the Mahua liquor.

The Gonds who had established their own kingdom much before the advent of the Mugals, still preserve in their memory the Age of Gold when they had lived far more prosperous lives. Julan inflicted by the hateful leprosy is disillusioned by gods. Flinging out the stump of his hands towards the village all he saw was poverty, disease and the darkness of ignorance. The gods are impotent or dead to him. He believed that the god Annadeo who had been fat and wealthy during the Age of Gold and who had provided them well had run away to Bombay. Rannu also reflects the memory of the Golden years as he says,

> In the old days, when the Gonds ruled the world, then showers of gold fell upon our fields. Then one worked and ten ate out of his labours. Now ten work, but do not earn for one (PH: 208).

Through the conversation between Panda Baba and Julan, one comes to learn that Mahadeo used to be their true God, but a Gond king called Bariya who was actually a devil claimed himself to be their true Bara Deo. Since he was rich and powerful the Gonds all began to worship him. When he died they buried him under a saj tree and drove a nail on the tree so that his spirit may not wonder and ever since have worshipped this prisoner of the saj[6] tree instead of Mahadeo. So, according to Julan the Gonds have remained poor ever since.

Other gods are also mentioned and there are plenty of them. Pawan Dassorie, the Wind finds narrative space with its aesthetic connotation. The wind is regarded as a god by the tribals, but a blind god that blindly knocks and blows away anything on its path. The spirit of the wind possessed Phulmat in her excommunication and misery, whispering in her ears he leads her away from Mulmula, whispering to her there is

nothing for her in Mulmula and to follow him and blow away as the spirit of the wind.

> The Spirit of the Wind was abroad, Pawan Dassorie the Wind, that had caught the primal atoms and whirled them together into solid earth, the Wind that had blown back the flames that licked at Rai Linga's[7] body on the day of his trial, the wind that was the ally of all wild things warning them of danger to come. Then up from the forest he came, Pawan Dassorie with flowing locks steaming behind him; he caught her hair and it danced esthetically in his embrace, he rode upon her, she surrendered her body to that onslaught; dropping her bundle, she flung out her arms in greeting. The Spirit rode upon her. Her wrongs were forgotten in that moment of wild rapture, the unseen glorious spirit of the wind possessed her. Now she was indeed as the wind is; homeless like the wind, and free as the wind. If only she could be invisible, and liberated from all feeling and all love, then she would wander gloriously over the face of the wide earth (PH: 134).

Most of the characters remain passive to their fates. Elwin had also mentioned this kind of passive attitude towards their lives in his autobiography. He mentioned in his autobiography that when he first settled in the tribal area he found that they had to rouse the people from their apathy. The prevailing attitude was that 'God has made us poor: it is no good trying to be anything else'. And 'we are poor men. What can we do?' Elwin had found the tribes to be so inclined to their fates that they lacked any kind of fighting spirit to change themselves. Such is the case with Phulmat too, who accepts her ill fated life with very little complaint and anger. Despite her miserable condition she is not inclined to anger nor hatred. All that she feels is an everlasting love for Gamira and she cherished memories of him and the love they had shared.

She, who had always been kind to others, who would skip meals whenever a malady struck in the village, does not deserve such an ill fated existence. She had always been kind to the orphaned Tutta, who is maimed, epileptic and very poor, an outcast of

the tribe with no family. She even sold her jewels to buy Tutta food. As a leper outcast herself, in her desperation her last resort was to live with Tutta and this also is also destroyed when Tutta died trying to save her from a burning house. Throughout the novel she remains a passive character who does not attempt to resist or fight her tragic circumstances. Though tribal women enjoy some amount of freedom and status, as a gendered subaltern Phulmat is humiliated by her lover when in her very presence her lover brings home another woman. She is thrown out of the house where she had worked as hard as any man in setting it up. In her aimless wanderings she falls victim to men who want to exploit her.

Phulmat's aimless wanderings expose her to the outside world. She is exposed to philosophies that she finds difficult to comprehend. Her encounter with the Christian priest is a strange incident for her. His philosophy of life is difficult for her to understand, though the priest tried to make it easy for her. Though she did not really understand his philosophy, the rosary that he presented to her remained a comforting item in her woes and it comforted her in her sufferings. The knowledge that someone had been betrayed by everyone and died for his friends and everyone comforted her. She was surprised that the priest did not try to seduce her which was quite uncommon in her experience. Her other encounter to the intricate Hindu philosophy is further complicated for her. The *sadhu's* words remains in her mind,

> 'You are to live in your body as a guest lives in the house of his friend. Be courteous to it, for long, you are to remain there. But the body is no more than the tree by the wayside under whose shade we rest'.
>
> 'And if the body grows unruly?' asked the boy sadhu shyly.
>
> 'Slay it; trample on it'. The old ascetic seemed to grow in stature as he spoke. 'Would you sleep on the coils of a serpent? Would you lodge in a

> tiger's cave? Slay first the tiger and the cave is yours. You can do nothing for the world till the snake is dead. An impure man who tries to help the world is like a corpse adorned with fair jewels – or a donkey bathing in the holy Ganges' (PH: 24).

Elwin seems to be aware that alien cultures and philosophies that are stronger than the tribal's own are obviously going to penetrate into their secluded lives. He obviously has a premonition that these alien cultures and beliefs are inevitably going to confuse the simple minds of the tribals one day and integrate them into a more dominant culture. There is a part of him that wants to protect them from these confusions that are going to disintegrate their ways of life and understandings. Yet there is also a part of him that understands that such integration is inevitable.

Elsewhere Elwin had also commented that the tribals who live far away from the Hindus are far more beautiful and self-sufficient than the tribals who are exposed to other civilizations. There is a difference between the villages of Mulmula and Baihakapa. The folks of Mulmula though poor could still live a primordial life that was self sufficient, for outside influence had remained minimal. The government machineries are mentioned through the dialogues of the characters and it is found that there is no love lost between the tribals and the Forest guards and policemen. Their presence in the village is not welcomed due to the demands they make from the inmates of the village. Baihakapa is a little different, for already the invasion of civilization had come trickling in, disintegrating the primordial life of the tribals there.

> Baihakapa was one of those villages in the midst of the forest which served as a headquarters for all those pacific, law-abiding bandits who came to exploit and rob the Gonds. It was full of Punjabis in search of cheap buffaloes, Bengalis in search of cheap timber, Gujeratis in search of harra contracts, Banias with false measures, Kalars with adulterated liquour, Marwaries with bales of foreign cloth. The Gond quarter of Baihakapa was

> aloof from the rest but not safe from it – an endless succession of adventurers invaded its seclusion, to tempt, to trade, to demand cheap labour (PH: 219).

And Phulmat finds that the Gonds in Baihakapa were not the free and happy tribesmen she had been used to in the village of Mulmula.

> They were nervous, suspicious, and dishonest; they trusted no one; they were reserved and cautious in their speech. The contagion of civilization was upon them. (PH: 219)

This is not surprising due to the fact that they are looked down upon and treated with reservation by the powerful and dominant forces that had invaded their territory. The manner in which they are negetively identified as, can be discerned from the dialogue between Mr. Duliram Nilkanth, and Peterson the Anglo-Indian engineer. The pompous timber contractor comments on the tribals as such

> Yes, there's only one way to deal with these Gonds – castrate the lot. Wipe 'em out. India can't do with 'em. We want to be a great nation. So we will be, but we can't have a lot of jungle monkeys hanging on our coat tails.
>
> ..These Gonds give me pain…Do you know when some Gond was awarded a medal for bravery – very unnecessary I thought it was – likely to raise 'em above themselves – the Governor couldn't pin it on him because he had no clothes except a loin-cloth. And he couldn't pin it there, ha-ha-ha, could he? It would look as if it were a reward for something else. Ha-ha." (PH: 228)

To this Peterson the Anglo-Indian engineer replies that they do not work so badly in his department. As such their department pays them well and he felt that other departments should be decent and honest enough to pay them as they do. That the tribals had not been treated decently enough is understood from his description of how they are being treated by the police

> The police take most of their labour by force and never pay them at all, and God knows what the forest people do. I knew a ranger who paid his junglies with an occasional bottle of wine and some opium (PH: 228-9).

To this, Mr. Nilkanth replies,

> …It's the best way to keep 'em quiet. In some of these coal mines, I'm told, they actually encourage 'em to drink and smoke ganja, because then they get into debt, and the management gets some kind of hold on them (PH: 229).

Thus stereotyping of the Tribal is created by the ones that have the power to do so, while the Tribal himself remains a silent silenced object, unable to defend himself. As for his culture, it becomes contemptible for the people around him who have become successful by materialism that came with modernization, while he remains a poor victim of modernization. The Tribal therefore

> ...feels himself inferior when he compares his own standard of living with that of the outsiders and becomes tense when these outsiders look down upon him, his culture and identity (Rath: 85).

According to K.C. Baral, "The book mixes fictional narrative with sumptuous ethnographies" (Baral: 22). And that,

> What has made the narrative fall short of an intense fictional work is the unconscious intervention of the ethnographer…. The interventions however raise serious questions regarding the authorial intention: is it an attempt to detribalize the tribes, or to integrate them into a culture that they hardly understand? Is it meant for the readers of a large community? If this is so, there is a real conflict between the ethnographer who wants to preserve the tribal world and the novelist who according to his own understanding of life, wants to transcend the world (Baral: 24).

When Gopinath Mohanty began writing his novels, the trend and spirit prevalent during the time was that of liberal romanticization of the 'primevial' world, especialy by the writers who portrayed the tribals and their way of life in their works. This could have been to a large extent the influence of Verrier Elwin who started the romantic trend in writing about the tribes of India. The spirit of western *primitivism* was also an

important influence which was prevalent during the time. Another noticeable trend that can also be perceived in many representations of the tribes was the influence of the various concepts and paradigms that evolved in the anthropological writings of the time with several variations. Representations of the Tribal started to change from this trend of romanticising the Tribal and his 'primevial' world after the nineteen seventies, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja* (written in Oriya in 1945) and translated by Bikram K. Das in 1987 is an outcome of the writer's personal experiences during his stay in the district of Koraput in Orissa which had a large tribal population. The author as a government officer during colonial rule saw through firsthand how the various laws that were made was affecting the tribals and which was especially influencial in changing their simple ways of life and livelihood. Gopinath Mohanty as a writer was basically concerned over social issues of various kinds. According to the translator's note,

> …*Paraja,* like all his other novels, is born out of passionate awareness, verging on anger. At a basic level his work has to be interpreted as an indictment of social oppression and abuse – a recurring theme in Mohanty's fiction. Here the exploited is a family of tribals; the exploiter, outwardly a non-tribal moneylender, is in reality the entire ethos of a materialistic civilization seeking to encroach upon and engulf a primordial and elemental life. (*PJ*: vi).

Thus, though the novel uses for its subject an individual tribal affected by social changes that take place, it deals on a broader aspect of the universality of Man's struggle for existence. While using for his protagonist a tribal subject, Mohanty lifts the Tribal and his problems to a wider concept, in showing that the tribals as human beings have their own problems and needs as human beings. The protagonist,

> Sukru Jani is not merely the primitive tribeman ensnared by the predatory moneylender from the city; he is also quintessential *man*, waging heroic

> but futile war against a hostile universe….the primeval consciousness of his tribal protagonist reflects perfectly the situation of the archetypal human being; their stark joys and interwoven anguish embody the complexity of the human condition (PJ: vi).

Though the novel follows the primordial romantic trend, it is a novel broadly written in a realistic mode depicting the clash of two diverse cultures of different mental attitudes where the weaker one has to inevitably disintegrate. Though Mohanty did not belong to a tribal community, he being of Oriya upper-class Hindu, one can discern through his interpretation wherein his sympathy lies. One wonders how Mohanty, as a part of the colonial government but with his sympathetic mind for the tribals, must have functioned in his capacity as an administrator. Through the narrative of the novel he reveals many emotional moments, as tragedy after tragedy strikes the main character. However, the author refuses to pass judgment and remains a detached observer, although his authorial presence as a keen observer is felt throughout the narrative.

Mohanty joined the Orissa Civil Service in 1938, and was posted for sometime in the district of Koraput where he came in contact with the various tribes who lived there. It was during these years of his stay that he produced two of his major novels; *Paraja* in 1945 and *Amrutara Santan* in 1947 both of which depict tribal life. Accounts of his great sympathy for the Tribal can be understood from the account of Jayantra Mohapatra who writes that Gopinath Mohanty was posted in Koraput district as the Special Assistant Agent (combining the duties of the S.D.O. and the Sub-judge). Here, his partiality for the tribal people earned him the hostility of the local landowners and moneylenders who even sent a petition to the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Part of this petition reads as follows,

> To our great calamity and disaster Sri Gopinath Mohanty is posted here as the special assistant agent at Rayagada. He is always fond of hillmen and behaves like hillmen himself. He very little respects other classes of people before them. He behaves as if he is only born for Adivasis (Mahapatra: 143).

Mohanty, in his capacity as a civil servant, staying and observing close by saw through firsthand the beginnings of the disintegration of the elemental ways of life of the tribals. Their simplicity, their closeness to nature often lacked the pretentions of civilised society and its preoccupation with money and success, its moral codes, its aggressiveness, its greed, cunning ways and selfishness. R.K. Barik, in a more recent writing about Tribal/Settlers conflict in a different context but with similar consciousness explains the mentality of the two groups as follows,

> The settlers came as a cohesive group with an aggressive approach to the material world, but this was not the case with the tribals. The tribes have never considered monetary transactions as an integral part of their cosmology….The importance of 'enjoyment of life' exceeds that of material needs in the life of the tribals. The material culture of the settlers and the spiritual world of the tribals thus came into sharp conflict (100).

Mohanty saw the gradual erosion of the tribals' 'primordial' way of life as large tracts of virgin forests were cleared and many kinds of settlers settled in the Tribal's territory. Settlers in this context were the outcome of colonial rule and their modern forest laws beginning with the first Forest Act of 1865. After the colonisation of India the colonisers seeing the rich forestry of India, had the mind to extract as much revenue from it for shipbuilding, railway constructions and military purposes. They began to enforce law after law which aggressively plundered the Indian virgin forests and drastically changed the lives of the Forest dwellers, mainly the tribals of India.

Government officials, money lenders and timber contractors began to settle in the Tribal's territory and encroachment by outside forces into the Tribal territory was

encouraged by the colonisers who insisted that it would bring in progress to the tribal people. The many forest laws and other laws were incomprehensible to the simple minds of the tribals. Their truthful nature, their illiteracy against written culture and the laws that failed to protect them along with the governmental machinery that failed them were instrumental in disintegrating their traditional ways of life.

The tribals began to be pushed out from their traditional habitats and the system of life and rituals that they had understood for generations. They, who had always thought themselves to be protectors of the forests for generations are now hounded as the destroyers of the forests. This is not just the story of the Parajas but a story that is repeated again and again through the length and breadth of the country for forest-dwellers especially the adivasis. In *Paraja*, the predicament of the villagers is explained as follows:

> …a pair of bullocks had to pay a 'plough-tax' for the privilege of grazing... in the forest…Anyone who had cleared a patch of jungle in which to grow his crops, slashing down the trees and burning them so that the ashes would enrich the soil, could be caught .. and fined or prosecuted….anyone found collecting honey from the forests without a license, or cutting down a piasal tree for timber with which to build his hut, would be answerable to the Forest Guard (PJ: 11).

For the Forest Guard was the only army of law in a stretch of dense forest. He roamed the forests in search of offenders and "the hill folk held him in mortal fear". They were asked to collect pulses and vegetables, and chicken and eggs for him, while some worshipped him as a god. And so,

> ….the tribals live under the constant threat of official persecution, and no existence in the jungle is possible unless one learns to play hide-and-seek with the law. Everyone wanted to save his own skin, and lies were spoken with great moral conviction. Their natural simplicity and honesty had been corroded by a lifetime of fear and insecurity. (PJ: 35)

As an administrator and living in close proximity with the tribals, Mohanty must have realized better than others the injustice being done to the tribals. Mohanty's stay in the tribal area in such close proximity with them makes him as informed as or even better, than a good fieldworker theorist who probably would have gone and studied the people through informants. Thus his representation of the tribals can be regarded as reliable resource as borne witness by his two novels novels *Paraja* and *Amrutara Santan* which clearly portray his findings.

The strongly open solidarity found in most of Mahasweta Devi's narratives for the people that she wrote about seem to be absent in Gopinath Mohanty's narrative. However they provide answers to many of the issues that are brought up in the present. After the two novels mentioned Mohanty turned his attention to other social concerns, though he still mentions about them in his later short stories. After 1948, his novels concentrated on other societies with whom he was more familiar with, like the lower caste rural society in *Harijan* (1948), *Danapani* (1955) and *Mati Matala* (1964). Incidentally, his Jnanpith Award winning novel, *Mati Matala,* carries a message of social revolution, which would introduce the benefits of modernization to the villages, such as education, modernized farming and other benefits to the rural poor.

Mohanty's portrayal of the tribal life and his sensitive, sympathetic perception does not give way to excess emotionalism and melodrama, for *Paraja* in spite of its romantic depiction of elemental life is realistic in its approach. As noted before, the spirit of realism was the trend of the time. The novel as a genre of writing became popular a generation after the famous Macaulay's Minutes of 1835, which introduced English literature into the British Indian curriculum. The Indian novel at first imitated the British

novels. Meenakshi Mukerjee in her book *Realism and Reality* (1985) notes the influence of the dominant Western convention of realism on the emerging class of English-educated Indian writers.

Experimentations in this new literary genre in the Indian soil were mostly done first in the Indian languages. For most of the writers the regional language must have been easier to handle, and writing in the language actually used by the characters they portray would have been more spontaneous. Being written in a regional language, like other regional works the novel had been subverted from a wider reading public. More than forty years lapsed before *Paraja* is translated into English, and it is with nostalgia that Das the translator writes that all the tribes who had once owned the mountains and forests have all been disinherited. "The mountains are being levelled now and the forests were cut down long ago; the tribes are disinherited. Soon, perhaps, they will be only a memory" (PJ: v).

It is through the ethnographic novel, which had documented the lives of these tribals that we read and understand about a way of life that had once exsisted and the reasons why it had disintegrated. As an ethnographic novel and a documented narrative, the novel's worth will be the answers that it will give to questions that are posed today and in the future, for it will link memory with the present. The translator in his act of exposing the novel for a wider reading public represents the tribals in his own way by translating a novel with documented realism that narrates a tribal's history and the social changes that came by about how the indigenous people of a place have been displaced and their forest retreats destroyed. Das further writes that "all that this English rendering can do is place before a wider audience something of the flavour of the original work" (PJ: viii).

The Oriya novel emerged in the late nineteenth century. In many ways it was influenced by the Bengali novel which had gained maturity and independence. Mayandhar Mansinha in his *History of Oriya Literature* (1962), points out that Bengali influence was not always a happy one. He says that the resurgence which occurred in Oriya literature during the latter part of the nineteenth century was partly a reaction to a linguistic campaign launched by a group of Bengali intellectuals who saw the Oriya language as a dialect of Bengali and sought the compulsory introduction of Bengali in all the schools of Orissa. To 'save' the Oriya language, a counter campaign was started by three well known Oriya writers: Fakirmohan Senapati, Radhanath Ray and Madhusudan Rao. (Mansinha: 167). Fakirmohan Senapati showed a decided preference for semi-urban settings with their new ideas and changing values, which set a trend in the Oriya novel. His style is simple, colloquial yet powerful. His novels achieve a happy blend of realism and idealism.

It was in this spirit of realism and idealism, and the local trend in depicting rural life, that Gopinath Mohanty began writing his novels in the spirit of the age of the 1940s. His narrative added a different element to his contemporaries in that to the rural setting he used the tribals as important characters by representing their lives and predicaments. The tendency of primitivism, the stark contrast between the 'primitive' and the 'civilised' and to a great extent the awareness of the prevalent anthropological works on the tribals with the reformists' theories during his time are often reflected in his representation of the tribals.

The early twentieth century saw a great deal of social and cultural ferment among the tribal people. Various Hindu movements started spreading among tribal people in different parts of India. In Bengal, the Shaddha movement prompted large numbers of

Santals to adopt Hinduism and led to the revolutionary movement by Jitu Santal in Malda during 1924-1932 (Sarkar: 136-164). In the Central belt many reformist groups worked among the Chattisgarhi tribals, such as the Gonds, Bhils, Baigas, Pardhans and others. In his autobiography Elwin mentioned a case where a reformer promulgated a new Gond religion and forbade dancing and drinking among the tribes (117-119).

These various movements were the outcome to countering the various missionary movements that were going on in the tribal regions, as well as the desire to bring these tribals into mainstream life and 'reform' their ways of living. Reflections from anthropological works have by this time constructed the tribals as perverse 'primitives' who wore little clothing and were almost naked. That they ate anything, spent time uselessly drinking liquor, believed in spirit-worship and witchcraft and indulged in dancing and sexual orgies. Hence, the many reform movements were out to change the eating habits of the tribals, make them forgo drinking and dancing, and incessantly stressed on 'morality'. That is to make the women wear clothes, to end the dormitory system, and introduce standards of living by introducing child marriage to control wayward women and other systems of behavior amongst the tribes. Even the governments of different states participated in this 'reforming' process, including the government of Orissa.

In 1940, the government of Orissa issued a directive to its officers asking them to discourage the dormitory-system because it tended to "emasculate these people". It is also during these years that Verrier Elwin who had lived for sometime amongst the tribals of central India, and who had by now acquired a great understanding of the tribals, staunchly defended the tribals and their culture. As an ethnographer who had popularised

the romantic view of the tribes, finding beauty and inspiration in their way of life as noted earlier, he had a different view of the prevailing notions of the tribes of India.

It was in this situation or climate of representations that Gopinath Mohanty wrote his novel *Paraja*. The narrative of the novel revolves around two main contrasting characters – that of Sukru Jani of the Paraja tribe and Ramachandra Bisoi, the Sahukar or the money-lender. They inhabit two different worlds which first meet and then merge into one another.

As the narrative moves on, ethnographic accounts of the Paraja tribe is unraveled within the plot of the story. The Parajas celebrate different festivals according to the changing seasons and months in the calendar. Chief among their festivals is the Festival of Spring which falls during March and is a fortnight of revelry, hunting and feasting. Mohanty explains it as a time when

> ...work is forgotten and the drums throb incessantly, day and night, to the rhythm of the dance: the old year is drummed away and the cycle of back-breaking labour begins again (PJ: 87).

He narrates a hunting expedition that each villager participates in, which merges with the narrative of the plot as it ends with the elopement of Bagla and Kajodi, and how their marriage is arranged in the customary way in which they were wedded. The *Aswina* month brings the *Dasahara* festival as they follow tradition and march down to Jeypore, the seat of the old kingdom, to celebrate the festival. During December another major festival is the Harvest festival, when fifteen days after the celebration of the festival the ritual of eating the new grain is followed.

> Each harvest came as the climax of an unending cycle, and bound them harmoniously to the land. The life in the soil lay dormant until they watered it with their sweat and warmed it with their breath; then it awakened, borne up on tender stalks. The miracle of the harvest had become to them as common

> as breathing; for the land never failed them. Out of the profusion of the soil the crows and sparrows and ants and grasshoppers were fed, and there still remained enough to nurse their joys and sorrows in the months to come, until the next harvest (PJ: 199).

Thus, the Harvest festival affirms the identity of the tribals to the land.

One comes to understand through the narrative of the novel, that the Parajas practice the bride-price system. The young men have to have sufficient money to have a wife. They also have the system of marriage by service when a young man who has no money to pay the bride-price offers his service to the girl's family instead of money. In the novel Nandibali Paraja offered his service to win Bili. In most tribal families, the bride-price is practiced, thus rendering the woman as an economic asset to her family and her status becomes reversed when the family follows the caste family dowry system. For Sukru Jani, "a Paraja father, having an unmarried daughter is as good as owning property, for she will fetch him a bride-price some day. Sukru Jani had two daughters." (PJ: 244)

Dancing accompanied with singing is important to the Parajas as much as it is to other tribal groups. In Sarsupadar an area is reserved for such community dances. In their community, only the young participate while the married, the old and the children are only spectators. Tribals respect their ancestors and many communities worship their ancestors. Even in Sarsupada, the spirits of the dead ancestors are also respected as stone memorials are placed in this open area. When the dancing area is prepared with bonfire,

> ...the stones placed in honour of the ancestors lay in rings encircling the fire – erect stones representing the men, and the flat ones the women. It was though the ancestors were spectators at the dance, watching the tradition continue in an unbroken line. Many springs had come and gone, and one group of dancers was replaced by another, but the stones remained to

> watch.The dead and the living came together to worship the joy of spring. (PJ: 149)

Among tribal societies, superstitious beliefs persist. Most tribes have their own system of communion with the dead, and their religion has affinity to their myth. Among the Parajas the Disari, or diviner

> …finds the clues to all future happenings from the almanacs which the wise men of the past have handed-down through the generations, recorded on palm-leaves. To the Paraja tribesmen, the Disari is all-knowing… (PJ: 143)

As other tribes of India, the Parajas have the dormitory system. There is a separate dormitory for the young men and women who sleep there at night away from their families. The dormitories become places where the young people conduct their courtships. Meeting between lovers take place in the privacy of the forest and not in the dormitories. In the novel, the dormitory becomes an idealized site for 'primeval' love to flourish. The young men express themselves with elaborate love-songs to the accompaniment of the *dungudunga*. The women reply with songs and the courtship finally culminates into a meeting between lovers in the privacy of the forest. During festivals the young dance throughout the night often ending in pairs and retiring to the forest. Love is taken as a natural part of life, and among these enchanted forests it is allowed to bloom freely. The depiction of 'primeval' love in *Paraja* is one of the main features which have contributed to its popularity.

The tribal dormitory may be seen as the centre around which the life of the community revolves. Once outside this centre, the young women, are accessible to the outside world. These young women are eroticized in various ways: they bathe naked at the pool, they flirt light-heartedly with any man who admires them and they choose their

own lovers, though this freedom is limited within the tribe. These descriptions of the Paraja women emphasize their exciting unrestrained sexuality and create an idyllic 'primitive' world.

The Wednesday *haat* or the weekly market is an important event in the lives of the Parajas as well as for the other tribal group who are their neighbours.

> Men and women think nothing of trekking many miles through dense forests or over steep hills to buy a copper's worth of salt or oil, or to sell a few chillies from the garden. In the uneventful lives of these people, the weekly market becomes more of a festival or a social event than an outlet for commerce. The women dress up in their brightest clothes and their gaudiest beads; their chattering becomes higher-pitched than usual, their songs are louder and their smiles are broader. The market is the place for meeting friends, new and old, and exchanging gossip. (PJ: 84)

Some key incidents in the novel also take place in the location of the *haat,* and often it is a place where lovers meet.

The location of the novel Sarsupadar is clearly Sukru Jani's world wherein is a life he had lived and understood. The Sahukar's world is left undefined because it keeps expanding in his hunger and greed to get more than he needed by trying to grab whatever he can from the lesser priviledged. The first part of the novel gives an idyllic picture of the normal everyday life that Sukru Jani leads in Sarsupadar before his peaceful life is disrupted. He misses his dead wife who had been killed by a tiger, but the tragedy is something he can comprehend since such calamity is a natural incident. He is happy living with his sons and daughters – the sons being Mandia and Tikra, and his daughters Jili and Bili. He is a contented man who is happy with whatever he has. He dreams of his future with enough cattle, land for harvesting and his family line multiplied. He dreams of a peaceful death and after – at the time his spirit would watch over his grand children from his memorial stone. There is very little he asks of life, for his needs are simple. This

idyllic existence is shattered by the forest-guard who lusts after Jili. Sukru Jani is permitted to cut the trees on a nearby hill and the forest-guard demands payment in the form of his daughter Jili. When Sukru Jani refuses to prostitute his daughter, the forest guard gets him arrested for cutting trees. So Sukru Jani pays a heavy fine which he can ill-afford. To pay off his debt, he becomes a *goti* or a bonded labourer in the Sahukar's household along with his younger son, Tikra.

Such an incident is very plausible in the situation of that period. As the Forest laws introduced state control over forests in the public interest, they not only curtailed the tribals' traditional rights to the forests, but also their traditional rights as guardians of the forests and its resources. In addition the laws brought in an army of forest officials into the tribal areas to enforce the forest laws. As the tribals were ignorant and uneducated, they had little understanding of the new laws thus making them victims and in many cases, victims of the oppression and abuse of the law by forest officials.

The colonial forest policy was instrumental in negating the tribals from the traditional role as the protectors of the forests to be identified as destroyers of the forests. With the policy of consumerism, a number of timber contractors entered the forests and large tracts of Sal trees were cut down. To some extent Mohanty in his narrative reflects the colonial view with its progressive mindset. Sukru Jani becomes the naive, uneducated tribal who is intent on cutting down trees and raising crops for his family. He dreams of a glorious future for his family as he went about his labour

> …all these trees could be cut down and the grounds completely cleared… 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 fellowmen from putting them to their proper use! (PJ: 22 – 23).

Here, the author's reflection is seen in the comment

> Sukru Jani knew nothing of soil conservation or the danger of destroying forests. Such consideration never entered his head. He was concerned with the present and with his small personal interests. (PJ: 23)

These words of the author reminds us that though Mohanty was sympathetic towards the tribals, there is a faint hint of his role as a practical civil servant entrusted with the task of 'protecting' the forests and administrating an area.

As in recent years, the discourse on indigenous peoples has become closely linked with the discourse on the conservation of our endangered eco-systems. In later years Mahasweta Devi traces the violence in modern society to the destruction of the bonds existing between the indigenous peoples and the forests – and by extension, between humanity and nature which she reflects in several of her short stories.

Mohanty's later short story *Shikar* also reflects on the underlying violence of our so called 'non-violent' societies by an unthoughtful incident of killing a tiger. As lord of the jungle the animal must have lived majestically in the jungles. As Sricharan reflects on the dead tiger, in his mind he pictures the tiger as "a symbol of exploitation, inequality and callousness" (*Shikar:* 42). He compares his killing of the tiger to a heroic warrior slaying the tiger repeatedly. His mind reflects on the Kandha rebellion.

> … now he recalled the bloodied forms of the Kandhas. The mounds of corpses…And once again their blood steamed out and soaked the grass (*Shikar:* 44).

Finally, the dead tiger symbolizes the silent races which have been crushed under the wheels of progress.

In *Paraja*, after Sukru Jani and Tikra become *gotis*, they leave the carefree and idyllic life of Sarsupadar to enter a contrasting dark and gloomy world of *goti* existence in the Sahukar's world. Mandia as the elder son is left to look after the household and the

women of the family. As most of the field work had been finished he meanwhile decides to earn money to pay the bride-price for marrying his sweetheart, Kajodi. He brewed liquor and earned some money after a good sell. On a tip-off from Chamru Domb, the dreaded Exise Officials come to make raids and all the brewed wine was caught. Mandia, is also caught along with others and had to pay a heavy fine which he could not pay, so he also become the Sahukar's *goti* in the process. Such incidents reveal the goverment's unequal laws. Brewers from outside were not barred as they paid taxes to the government, while the tribals were barred from brewing their local drinks.

The prohibition on liquor in tribal areas is a good example of the puritanical values guiding colonial government. Liquor, whether mahua wine, rice-beer or date palm beer – had an important place in tribal life. It not only formed a component of their diet, it also added zest to their frequent festivals and dances. Moreover, it was used in their sacrifices and religious ceremonies, for some of their myths are attached to their local drinks. The attack on tribal 'drunkenness' was based on two grounds: on moral grounds and on the ground that it induced habits of indolence among them. On the first count, it was argued that since drinking accompanied dancing and since dancing was a licentious pastime, both drinking and dancing needed to be stopped in order to enforce 'morality' among the tribals. On the second count, drinking was believed to aggravate the tribals' natural habits of indolence and sloth. To the Western progressive mind tutored in the Protestant ethics, the tribals' easy-going, pleasure loving nature was unacceptable. Attempts were therefore made to transform tribal societies into the kind of market economy known to the reformers, which required the virtues of parsimony, industry and thrift.

Another oft-invoked feature of the government's Prohibition policy was its lucrative value for state revenues. Verrier Elwin pointed this out when he said

> …while I think that rice-beer is a thing which should not only not be banned but should actually be encouraged, for it is nothing more than a nourishing and palatable soup with a kick in it, there can be little doubt that distilled liquor, which has been positively supported by the Governments in order to inflate their revenues is injurious.. (Elwin: 335)

Gopinath Mohanty's attitude to tribal "drunkenness" is ambiguous. He understands their love for liquor; he also realizes the harm done inadvertently by the insensitive Prohibition policy. Nevertheless, he also displays a hint of scorn, as when he writes,

> …liquor was such an important part of life here that a tribesman would rather forego a meal than a bottle of pungent mahua wine. There could be no festivities without liquor not only to propitiate his gods but also to drown his hunger and his misery. With mahua wine in his veins, he was king of the forest again; sober, he was only a weak, miserable, sniveling creature, easy prey to the ruthless officials and the wily money-lender. (PJ: 98)

After Jili and Bili without the men in their family are left alone at home, drastic changes occur in their lives. They are looked down upon by members of their own people in the village. Jili is deserted by her lover Bagla, who turns his attention on her best friend, Kajodi. Now Jili has only one admirer – the ugly and misshapen goti named Kau Paraja whom she despises.

Even in recent Tribal representations, when the men folk are away due to their jobs elsewhere the women are left alone to guard the fort. In their poverty and destitution tribal women very often fall prey to those who eye her for exploitation in different forms. Money-lenders and pimps are the prominent forms. In the novel, in the absence of the men in their family to protect them, poverty compels the two sisters Jili and Bili, to move out of the village and work at a highway construction site. Here they are soon lured into prostitution by the Supervisor, who is a young non-tribal man, through Rami whom he uses in his pursuit "as hunters use tame she-elephants as decoys" (PJ: 220). The

Supervisor rewards them with money and gifts – colourful sarees, cakes of perfumed soap, scented hair oil and cheap trinkets – which they gloat over in secret.

While the Supervisor is the main culprit of the girls' degeneration, there are other factors that lead to their downfall. It was also due to the ill fate of their men and the absence of their parents who had always lovingly protected them from poverty and hunger. Though their father had been a strong man he has now become a helpless victim. Mandia the brother in charge of them, though physically all man is weak mentally. There is also the failure of their tribesmen to help and support them during hard times, who instead look down on them due to their helplessness in their poverty. For "On the surface, there is no evidence of class snobbery or prejudice, but sooner or later its existence becomes inescapably obvious" (PJ: 118).

Unlike Phulmat who had been fiercely defended by her clansmen, Jili and Bili are not as fortunate. With Bagla's desertion, Jili is accompanied by the pain and loneliness that she carried in her heart which makes her vulnerable to Rami's logic. Rami who pimps for the Supervisor, tells the sisters:

> In our tribes its perfectly normal for a girl to live with anyone she likes, for as long as she likes – there's nothing immortal in that. And anyway, you shouldn't be worrying your pretty little head about such things. At your age the only sin is to shut yourself up the way you're doing (Paraja: 223).

While Rami's words may be true to a great extent, what Jili had ignored is the fact that the tribal girl's freedom is limited within her tribe. She cannot choose a non-tribal, and more so a *diku*. Sometimes, she also cannot choose a man from another tribe. She forgets that her father who is a typical Paraja patriarch would not accept her affair with any outsider. So, even when Jili later becomes the mistress of the Sahukar, Sukru Jani

cannot accept such a relationship and calls a village council to pressurize the Sahukar and he refused to accept the Sahukar's offer of bride-price to be officially married to Jili.

A direct result of the entry of 'outsiders', the government officials, missionaries, settlers and social reformers was the weakening of the social fabric and the erosion of the tribals' customs. The tribals forced to poverty and degradation cannot define their identity from their position- therefore their tragedy. The situation faced by the inhabitants of Sarsupadar reflects on the whole, the failure of their traditional cohesive systems as a result of the new and unequal power relations that emerged between them and the modern state apparatuses. The village council fails to frighten the Sahukar. Instead it is they who are intimidated by the Sahukar's talk of going to the court and the police. The tribals cannot even form any sort of solidarity to defend themselves against the onslaught from outside forces. Instead they try to win their own favors by telling on each other. When Sukru Jani confronted his tribesmen, he said

> ...you gave evidence against me and made it look as if I am a liar! You, who are my brethren, you did that to me! But I won't judge you. God will judge between you and me; he sees all. You have done your part and ruined me and now my four children will be destitute.

Dhepu Chalan's reply is:

> Just because you were in the tiger's grip, are we to go and to put our heads in its mouth?...Do you think anyone here is going to incur an official's vengeance? We simply dare not defy him, and you know it. We have to do as he tells us. You are angry with us, but there's nothing we can do. We too have families and our children. Be sensible and try to understand how it is with us, and then you won't blame us. (PJ: 39)

Even in the later part of the novel, the headman rationalizes his submission to the Sahukar by saying that Jili's relationship with the Sahukar could be a 'blessing' for the other women of the village:

> The Sahukar is a big man and we are small men; and he knows all the big people. Can we fight him? Besides, this may be a blessing for all of us. Let's hope that beast will stop prowling after our wives and daughters now! And as we all know, there are government officials who come to our villages and take our women and keep them and throw them out again when they're tired of them. We know nothing about these men, but we let them have our women. At least we know the Sahukar; he belongs to these parts, and he's taken a girl of our tribe as his wife. We are lucky he wants to become one of us – a rich man like him! That fool Sukru Jani doesn't understand a thing! But he'll get used to it in time. (Paraja: 318 – 319)

The people of Sarsupadar are caught in a situation which they cannot handle – their age-old systems have been rendered ineffective and no new ones have evolved to replace them. So the only way the headman can save face is by accepting the Sahukar's aggression as an act of grace and by transforming Jili's 'treachery' into a noble gesture.

In *Paraja*, most of the action originates from the land. Both the non-tribal settlers and the tribals are obsessed with a hunger for the land, but the Sahukar's avaricious hunger is contrasted with Sukru Jani's attachment to land as identity. For Sukru Jani,

> As he gazed at his lands he felt like a brother to the forest and the crops, for, like them, he was born of the earth and belonged to it. (PJ: 275)
>
> His beloved land was being ravished by an alien, and if he so much as looked at it he would be abused, perhaps kicked….what bitterness; to have to pass by one's own land, in which the history of generations lay buried, without being able to look at it; he had betrayed himself, been false to the Earth. It would never forgive him. He could see his ancestors rising up from beneath the memorial stones and pointing at him. He burnt in shame (PJ: 280).

Even for his son Mandia:

> The rice-field was a legacy from his ancestors. Generations of his forefathers had laboured on that land and the touch of their hands had made the soil smooth and soft. To Mandia, it was no mere piece of land, but a record of the history of those past generations, of their bygone tales of sorrow and rejoicing and of tradition and change. And he thought of all the generations before him and those that were yet to come; and how the ashes of those who

> were dead and the seeds from which future generations would spring up had been mixed together in that soil (PJ: 63).

The Sahukar's private ownership of land is also contrasted with the communal holding of land among the tribals. For the Sahukar it is a symbol of status to own more and more of land and to exploit it for his gains. The simple tribals believe that their lands are a gift from the headman, who is the real owner of the lands. They have no record of ownership. When the Sahukar contrives to get the headman changed, they are thrown into confusion. The Sahukar also manipulates the land revenue records and gets lands transferred to his name. His desire for land is out of greed and desire for status symbol. The tribals seek the intervention of the court, but their ignorance of the workings of the law works against them and they eventually lose their case as well as their lands. So they eventually become *gotis*.

Sukru Jani gets his freedom from being a *goti* by mortgaging his land to the Sahukar. This brings the Sahukar to Sarsupadar where he casts his avaricious gaze over the entire village. He wants more lands, more *gotis*, wealth and women. He flaunts his wealth around and displays his powers. The simple people with fear are in awe of him. With the help of Madhu Ghasi, a Domb, he seduces many women. He also casts his lustful eyes upon Jili and finally seduces her.

Jili's seduction becomes an extension of the Sahukar's aggressive possession of Sukru Jani's land. This analogy between the land and the woman (here the daughter) highlights the mentality underlying aggressive colonization. History records countless examples of invading armies raping the women of the territories they conquered. Post-colonial discourses also conclude that such kind of action is a part of colonialism since the violation of their women challenges the manhood of men. They feel their manhood

threatened when they cannot defend and protect their women. In the novel the woman's body becomes a ground of contestation, a battlefield where the possession symbolizes the ultimate humiliation of the conquered enemy. It is clear that Jili's relationship with the Sahukar also hold such similar implications for Sukru Jani. So, he refuses to accept the bride-price offered by the Sahukar, thereby negating all chances of a marriage between the two. In the absence of a legal and a social union between them, Jili remains Sukru Jani's daughter and he still hoped to reclaim her and salvage his pride.

After Jili deserts her home, the two sons manage to collect enough money by brewing liquor to get the mortgage lifted from their land. The Sahukar, however, refuses to release their land. He accused the men for stealing money and maded sure that they should be disgraced. A court case ensues and the three men are forced to part with most of their savings. Finally, they are tricked into losing the case. Despair then drives the men to plead with the Sahukar once again. But he mocks them by saying:

> I've taken the land; I've taken one sister; and I shall take the other too. I shall take your wives; I shall drive you from court to court through the length of the country. I shall make you sweat your lives as gotis, and I shall rub your noses in the dust. If I don't, my name is not Ramachandra Bisoi! (PJ: 372)

Unable to endure this final insult, the three men cut him down with their axes. The cunning Sahukar had manipulated Jili into believing that her men were the ones who were wrong. While witnessing the murder she is so scared that she runs away from the scene. In spite of the Sahukar's incessant blows on the men, the three Paraja men however fail to convert this murder into an act of retribution and triumph. They regret what they had done almost as soon as the crime is committed. Truthful and honest as they are they surrendered themselves at the police-station with the words: "We have killed a

man. Give us whatever punishment we deserve" (PJ: 373). The tribal patriarch who had lost everything dear to him and the Sahukar who had so much wealth but is never satisfied all become victims with no one as the winner.

The sharp contrast in the characterization between that of Sukru Jani and the Sahukar in *Paraja* can be said to reflect the author's pre-concieved notions of the 'primitive' and the 'civilised'. Sukru Jani and the Sahukar are clearly antithetical figures – physically and mentally. While Sukru Jani is the quintessential 'noble savage' the Sahukar is greedy, cunning, dishonest and lecherous. While Sukru Jani is a loving father and a faithful husband who cherishes the memory of his dead wife, the Sahukar is not content with marrying once and keeps lusting after other women. Again while Sukru Jani is naive and gullible, the Sahukar is devious and often uses lies and trickery to get his own way. In the end, Sukru Jani becomes the looser in spite of possessing better human qualities. He becomes a rather absurd and pathetic figure who loses everything and also fails to get the support of his tribesmen. He is completely overshadowed by the Sahukar's aura of power.

This sort of characterization threatens to become what David Rabkin calls "simplistic rules of thumb for understanding of character" (38). For example, Sukru Jani is we are told, "...shares with all the people of his tribe, the belief that all this has been created by invisible spirits…" (PJ: 4); he has "the tribesman's instinctive dread of writing made on paper" (PJ: 35); he beats up Kau Paraja ferociously because "a tribal roused to fury is like a beast of the jungle". (PJ: 31)

A similar categorization is evident in the many descriptions of physical appearances. For example, Sukru Jani's body is described as "a mass of bulging muscles; his calves are as hard as rock and his bare skin is proof against all weather" (PJ: 6); Jili

"sits on the porch with her legs streached out before her. Her raven-black hair is oiled and combed into smooth, slanting bun into which she has struck a red flower" (PJ: 2); Bagla is "like a straight and tall saal tree, and she (Jili) like the siali creeper which spreads itself all over the saal tree with its clinging tendrils" (PJ: 16); Mandia Jani is "all man, with a powerful body". (PJ: 16). These descriptions converge on one thing – the 'primitive' body and the strength, beauty and vitality associated with it.

Contrasted with these descriptions of the beauty of the Tribal's beautiful body are the descriptions of the non-tribal characters. While descriptions of the tribal characters focus on the strength and grace of their bodies without touching on their faces, in contrast the descriptions of the characters of their enemies concentrate only on their faces and facial expressions. For instance the Sahukar is described as having "thick, drooping moustaches which trailed in any liquid he sipped. His deep set eyes gleamed under bushy eyebrows and thick eyelashes with an expression of cunning, but a smile playing on his thick lips" (PJ: 48). Phaul Domb has "always a smile playing on his long, thin face, so like the snout of a mongoose" (PJ: 39), Madhu Ghasi is "a sturdy young man with thick lips and pink eyes" (PJ: 255). This sort of selective description separates the characters into two different spheres which they are perceived to inhabit – the physical/vital and the mental/ degenerate. Such descriptions also tend to demoralize the non-tribal characters; the Sahukar especially acquires an aura of unallied evil which defies comprehension or compassion.

What needs to be understood is that what is endowed of these characters occasionally with complexity is the ambivalence of their position. The 'primeval' tribals are not simply the passive victims of oppression perpetrated by 'civilised' society; sometimes they also collaborate actively with the dominant/ 'civilised' groups in their

bid for survival or otherwise. Gopinath Mohanty shows the social structure of that period to be in a state of constant flux, with alliances being formed across caste and class boundaries. In Sarsupadar itself, an upper class group is evident which collaborates with the forest –guard in oppressing Sukru Jani. The Sahukar, who is a Sudhi by caste, utilizes the services of Madhu Ghasi, the Domb, to procure women as the supervisor utilizes the service of Rami. Jili, the Paraja girl, goes to work at the road construction site, because her tribesmen did not help her in her misery and poverty but looked down on her. It was a tribal woman who tempts her to prostitution. She later becomes the Sahukar's mistress after her loneliness and being jilted by Bagla, her lover, and it was through the persistence of a tribal Madhu Ghasi that she is seduced. The court Writer and the Pujari collaborate with the Sahukar to trick Sukru Jani out of his land. This habitual blurring of the 'subaltern' and the 'elite' categories is also pointed out by Ranajit Guha:

> Taken as a whole and in the abstract this last category of the elite was heterogeneous in its composition and … differed from area to area. The same class or element which was dominant in one area could be among the dominated in another. This could and did create many ambiguities and alliances, especially among the lowest strata of the rural gentry, the impoverished landlords, rich peasants and upper-middle peasants all of whom belonged, ideally speaking, to the category of 'people' or 'subaltern classes'… (Guha: 8)

An intriguing element in *Paraja* is the lurking sense of rivalry between the oppressed groups. The Parajas and the Dombs vie with one another for the favours bestowed by the dominant group – the forest-guard, the Sahukar, the government official and so on. In the process, they often betray each other. Chamru Domb tips off the excise officers about the brewing of illicit liquor; Madhu Ghasi procures Domb and tribal women for the Sahukar; some other Dombs are said to send their women to satisfy the lust of the government officers. The Parajas, on their part, often display a scornful

attitude towards the Dombs. Sometimes, an uneasy alliance exists between them but the sense of mutual contempt also surfaces time and again. So when the forest-guard sends Kau Paraja to procure Jili, Sukru Jani reprimands him by saying:

> But why must that nal tree pick on my poor Jili when there are others only too willing? The Dombs would feel flattered if the Forest-Guard asked for their women! Go and try your luck with them! (PJ: 30)

In another incident, a group of Paraja men talk contemptuously about the Sahukar's greedy and lecherous nature and conclude by agreeing among themselves that he must have "some low Domb blood" in his veins. Here, by attributing a low birth to the Sahukar, the Parajas reveal their own internalization of the dominant caste/class ideology – a phenomenon common among many subaltern groups.

The attitude towards the Dombs is seen by the author as another symptom of their degenerate nature. It is presumably the Christian Dombs like Alisander, Pilemon and Johana, who send their women to the government officials and also reap the most benefits from them. Sometimes, as in the incident of the illicit liquor, the Christian Dombs' collaboration with the excise-officers seems to indicate their allegiance to the 'moral' laws of the colonial and Christian government. This attitude towards the Dombs seems to reflect the author's own caste prejudices and contempt for the converted tribals. All the Dombs are portrayed as cunning and treacherous without exception. The genuine contempt of the Christian missionaries' work among the lower-caste groups in India is also negated by the author.

The emphasis on the exotic quality as embodied in tribal dancing and tribal nudity, often constructs these societies as 'primeval' paradises where the mundane matters of life are not important. Even in *Paraja*, a chain of dancing and love-making occurs despite the

tribal people's increasing destitution. The young people, particularly, seem unaware or else unconcerned about the changes happening around them. After Sukru Jani and Tikra become *gotis* and leave Sarsupadar, Mandia fails in his responsibility in his role as head of the household. In his carelessness and indulgence in drinks he is also caught in the web to become a goti himself. Jili fails to be strong mentally, because her parents had worked hard so that the children would not know hunger and pain. Their father had always wanted them to enjoy life in their youth. Even Jili's life had always been protected by her father and her brothers, hers had "been a carefree life, even if, like all girls in the hills, she had to work hard" (PJ: 116) in different ways. But she had done it all under her father's direction with no responsibility on her shoulders. And so she always had the time to dress herself and flirt with men. So, alone she could not shoulder the burden that was posed upon her leading to her disintegration.

As for the Sahukar, he is allowed to grow into a threatening menace because the people refuse to change themselves or their customs and ways which he took so much advantage of. Their expensive festivals which are way beyond their means, the bride-price for many is heavy burden which has led them to loan money from the Sahukar and sending many to become *gotis*. Their superstitious beliefs show that they need better education. Their failure to build solidarity amongst themselves to protect themselves as a community instead of trying to find favours with their enemies, and destroying their own tribesmen and not supporting the weak when they need help of their tribesmen. Their truthful and trusting nature especially in not trying to question the Sahukar's written document is a part of their doom. In these and other situations, the Parajas are projected as naïve and impractical. Their cultural practices are also separated from the socio-economic base on which they rest which make them vulnerable in a modernizing world

of materialism. They depend on one harvest to the next. “Wealth is measured in terms of the quantity of grain in his attic.” (PJ: 118)

The essence of the ‘primitive’ way of life is conveyed through a lyrical prose which is based on the rhythmic speech patterns of the Parajas. Gopinath Mohanty’s original Oriya prose has been described as “vigorously colloquial and forthright at one moment and sublimely effervescent and lyrical at the next”. (PJ: viii) It may be said to the credit of the translator, Bikram K. Das that a close flavor of the original lyricism still remains in the English translation. The narrative is interspersed with long, sonorous passages describing the changing seasons, the everyday life of the Parajas, the courtship of the young people and their festivals and dances. Similarly, the novel contains many songs which capture this lyrical quality, recalling as they do the plaintive ballads and love-songs of the tribal people.

It is clear that Gopinath Mohanty’s acceptance of the primitivist approach is conditioned by his own first hand observation. His characters may display some ‘primordial’ qualities but they also encounter the same existential dilemmas that we all do and their suffering touches a common chord. Also, by placing the tribals in the complex caste/class alliance system against a recognizable background, the author reduces their ‘primitive’ nature and makes them identifiable. In this approach, conventional realism is blended with the romantic/primitivist outlook.

In *Phulmat of the Hills*, the village Mulmula is still remote from outside influence. Phulmat while in the village is safe in the warmth of her clansmen. The dangers that lurk in the village are sickness, magic, superstition and wild animals and most of the problems the characters face are internal or within the tribes. Out of the confines of her village, she witnesses the slow disintegration of the ‘primordial’ life affected by outside influences.

These she witness as through other Gonds and her own clansmen outside her village. She is thrown into confusion by stronger philosophies than her simple knowledge, which she can hardly discern. In *Paraja,* the march of civilization has already entered the village of Sarsupadar. The tribals cannot protect their identity as their life goes through slow disintegration caused by external forces where they are helpless victims, as well as in their internal situations where their ways of life becomes no match to a modernizing world. They no longer have the courage to protect each other, and it will be the whole community that will suffer eventually. The Parajas still stick to their old ways and do not yet understand new ways to protect themselves which eventually lead to their disintegration.

Both Elwin and Mohanty represent the tribals from different areas during colonial rule. It is obvious that both writers had a vision of the tribals' future. Though both reveal their sympathy for the tribals and are nostalgic of the inevitable disappearing of the 'primordial' life, they remain helpless spectators. Both probably had no great political power to change their situations. One an ethnographer turned fiction writer and one a novelist giving ethnographic accounts through his novel. Both authors try to represent lived experiences through their characters and both have done a substantial job in contributing narratives that are documents in relaying tribal history. These two novels *Phulmat of the Hills* and *Paraja* may not be given due recognition, but as ethnographic fictional accounts they are significant for they are documented narratives that will retain or revive memory and give answers to questions we pose today.

Endnotes

(Notes drawn on the novel *Phulmat of the Hills* are derived from *Leaves from the Jungle* 1936 by Verrier Elwin)

[1]The *gunia*, magician or medicine-man, is in great demand in a Gond village, for sickness is nearly always ascribed to the agency of witches or malignant spirits. The procedure is for the *gunia* to be called to the sick man's house and given his fee.

[2]The forests Seoni which is the inhabitat of the Gonds is the location of Kipling's *Jungle Book.*

[3]The Pardhans and the Bhimas are both offshoot of the Gonds. They are musicians and dancers. The difference between the two is that the Pardhans beg only from Gond household, whereas the Bhimas go anywhere. The Pardhans play on the *kingri*, and the Bhimas play on the *tuma.*

[4]If one is a Gond or a Baiga, one can be excommunicated for almost anything. The most fruitful cause is eating with or having sexual relations with someone of another tribe. But one can also be excommunicated for getting worms in a wound, being beaten with a shoe, having your ear torn in a quarrel with your wife, going to jail – not because it is a disgrace to go to jail, but because you will probably eat from a common kitchen there, touching a corpse of a dead donkey, and so on. The dinners that have to be given in order to obtain readmission to tribal privileges are a serious economic drain on the life of the community.

[5]Bhimsen is originally one of the Pandava brothers. He has been selected out of the entire body of Hindu legend for special honour by the aboriginal tribes. To the Baigas, he is god of rain. To the Gonds, he is the embodiment of manly strength. He is associated mainly with rocks, mountains and rivers.

[6]*Terminalia tomentosa.* It is the sacred dwelling place of Bura Deo, the Great God of the Gonds. There is no oath more binding than one taken on a twig of the holy *saj*.

[7]King of the forest and ancestor of the Gonds.

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Chapter 4

Ethnographic Novels: Representing the Tribal in *The Primal Land* and *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*

> Once the Bondas had been free in a slave country; now they are slaves in a free country.
>
> - Pratibha Ray (*The Primal Land* : 290)

With the ethnographer's narrative changing from discovery of a people, conquering new worlds and colonising them, other greater challenges remain for the ethnographer especially in his role as a story- teller, for the story of domination and subordination continue to be a prominent narrative even in our time space. Man has survived through harsh environments, wars and pestilences, but today, discourses on indigenous peoples pose certain issues such as loss of traditions and way of life which is usually an outcome of displacement. A question that hangs is – will a culture survive the onslaught of a stronger one? Narratives of threatened peoples on the verge of extinction either by choice or by force remain dominant narratives in our globalizing world. It becomes then either a discreet or a determined desire for the modern day ethnographer to find out clues of lived experiences within the framework of a culture or to perceive patterns not apparent to those within the system itself of people undergoing cultural change.

In the first chapter it had been mentioned that Edward M. Bruner had pointed out that ethnography even in its scientific mode is an act of story-telling. For, like a story which has a beginning, a middle and end, cultures also change taking the form of the past, a present and a future. Every telling of a culture changes since culture is dynamic and do not remain the same. The ethnographer's predicament is that he has only the present, the contemporary scene and he has to situate the present in a time sequence by

some means or the other and anticipate the future which is more or less like writing fiction. When ethnography is written in the form of the novel, it is a useful method to represent a people, their culture and to connect the past with their present and anticipate their future through symbolic ways, as Pratibha Ray has done in *The Primal Land* (Oriya title is *Adibhumi* 1993) translated by Bikram K. Das in 2001 while representing the Bonda tribes of Orissa as an engendered tribe of India. Or as Mahasweta Devi has done in tracing the life patterns of the Mundas through their songs and stories in the novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* (Bangla title is *Chotti Munda ebang Tar Tir*1980) translated by Gayatri C. Spivak in 2002, in order to know and understand the Mundas as honest, simple and peace loving people. To understand them as a people who have lost their ownership of their lands and their traditional cultivation, trying to forget all their owes and troubles in their precious festivals which is again gradually being taken away from them, through a long tradition of dominance and subordination challenging them to violence and resurgence. The ethnographic novel helps to understand and place a people's long historical heritage and culture in the context of present socio-political systems.

The novels *The Primal Land* and *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* are contemporary novels written by contemporary writers who have both written about incidences that have taken place years after Indian independence. *The Primal Land* brings forth issues mainly around the 1980s that have impacted on the traditional beliefs of the Bonda tribe, wherein the older members watch with helplessness and defeat while the younger and more enlightened members have various questions hanging in their minds especially the feared question, will the Bondas manage to keep their culture alive. But resistance is throttled by powers beyond them, on a people who are considered to be honest and once feared for

their dreaded bows and arrows. *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* brings forth issues mainly around the 1970s, though happenings in the 1970s are continuations of their exploitation and false representations that have pushed the Mundas to violence and resistance.

The previous chapter had dwelt upon the works of two novelists who had represented the Tribal on issues during colonial times. The two contemporary novels in this chapter clearly show that years after independence, the Tribal still carries false representations of him that are exploited by the ones who dominate and are still keeping the old order alive. The two novels in this chapter clearly show that for the Tribal there is no post about his colonialism, which has compelled him to fight against the forces that continue to exploit him. The narration of domination and subordination continue and even grow worst in many cases with unsympathetic politicians and governmental machinery enabling the narrative of dominance and subordination to continue.

Bruner also says that if the people under study are seriously threatened:

> ...the anthropologist may even make a political decision to intervene on behalf of the people, or possibly to take steps to prevent cultural extinction or genocide (132).

In most cases both the ethnographer and the native remain helpless to political changes and conflicting narratives, for both are caught up in the same web of systems and situations, "influenced by same historical forces, and shaped by the dominant structures of our time" (Bruner: 139). As the ethnographer no longer has the power and authority that he once used to enjoy, in many instances all that he can do is to retell a dominant narrative from a different point of view and to represent through his narrative or retelling, the truths about discrepant worlds. To show that we all have the same personal biases, individuality and selective perceptions and that we are all really humans after all.

Narrative of exploitation, resistance, and resurgence remains an international narrative and the modern day ethnographer as the one who tries to discern lived experiences within a culture is caught in a web of telling/writing their story for others to listen/read. The modern day ethnographer then retells a story from inside a culture which is a parallel narrative to a dominant historical narrative and so retellings from centre to periphery cannot cease and will not cease, as conceptions of equality grow stronger in a world of sameness and differences.

Pratibha Ray spent some time in the Bonda habitat while doing research work. She had firsthand knowledge and contact with the Bondas, studying about them and their social structure, so her novel *The Primal Land* is considered to be a relevant ethnographic work that is an outcome of intensive fieldwork. As an ethnographic novel it is a fictionalised reconstruction of the Bonda tribe living in the remote area of Malkaigiri region, which used to be under Koraput district and is in the south-western corner of Orissa. Orissa has sixty-two 'scheduled Tribes' and the Bondas are believed to be the most primitive amongst them. According to the translator Bikkram K. Das in the introduction of the novel, this novel "could well serve as their obituary" (PL: viii) for the Bondas are being assimilated by stronger cultures and are on the verge of extinction. Both the translator and the writer are drawn to a similar concern. They are concerned about a culture that is on the verge of disappearing and being caught in the same web of dominant structures, all they can do is represent the Bonda tribe to voice their concern.

The Bonda tribe call themselves *remo* or 'man' while the term Bonda which means 'naked' or 'savage' is a term given to them by the plainsmen, which they carry even today. Being of the Austro-Asiatic group, they speak the Dravidian language and have lived in this area for ages, hidden in these remote mountains from the curious gaze of the

civilised world and have maintained their customs for generations until civilisation came marching into their territory and decided to change them.

> The Bonda is suspicious of civilisation; he despises anyone who is clothed. Soma Munduli has heard that in some distant age the Bondas had retreated from the plains into these mountains, tired of the pressures of civilization. That is why the Bonda mistrusts all plainsmen. Anyone who descends into the plains becomes alien. (PL: 80)

As noted earlier, when an ethnographer and the creative writer resort to using the ethnographic novel as a form of representing a people that he had close contact with, the narrative of the novel tends to get into narrative complications as the novelist attempts to put in a number of cultural explanations within his plot and introduces many characters, which can be quite confusing. Such kinds of narrative diversion from the main plot can pose tedious reading material. However the polyphonic nature of the novel with the discreet absence of the author help us to be more familiar with the characters that are involved since the story imbedded along with cultural explanations connect us to the understanding of life that may be quite unfamiliar to us. For, in this kind of a novel form, the author reveals a lot of cultural information through his portrayal of characters who are endowed with cultural traits.

As a typical ethnographic novel, *The Primal Land* begins with a detailed description of the Bonda land giving an exact location inside the map of India. The author's narrative sets us in the mood of the remoteness and inaccessibility of the Bondas habitat. The first part of the novel is a detailed ethnographic account of the Bonda way of life. The next part of the novel is a narrative of assimilation and subjugation under independent India. The novel does not have a definite protagonist or a single narrator but with the author's own discreet presence at different turns through the multiple voices,

one can discern the concern of the writer. Though there is no main character in the novel, in the character of Soma Munduli the eldest of the living member of the tribe, many of the traditional characteristics of the tribe are projected and the Bonda cultural traits are exposed through the narration of his life. According to Ray,

> Soma Munduli is himself the unwritten history of the Bondas. He is the oldest surviving member of the tribe. A living ancestor (PL: 6).

Indeed Soma's life and his manner of death itself is an explanation of the Bonda's way of understanding life. Soma dies at the hand of a younger Bonda's arrow who feels that Soma is the cause of his sister's death, and takes his revenge. The act of killing for revenge of one's own kin is neither crime nor sin, but just a way of life. It is greater to die nobly than live an ignoble life. As Buda's wife Sukri tells Buda, "it's not important to live longer; what matters is to live like a man! What use is it if you have to sell yourself to survive?" (PL: 88).

A Bonda's growth to a marriageable age is revealed through the life of Soma, who was eight years old when he got married. A traditional Bonda courting and wedding is also narrated in the wedding of Soma Munduli. The expensive life style of a Bonda as he spends money on ornaments to please a woman, the amount a father has to spend for the bride-price, giving a feast for everyone and to setting up a new home for the newlyweds, are all embedded in the narration of Soma's life.

In the Bonda country, Ray has chosen for the main location of her novel the village of Mudulipara which serves as a capital in the *bara jangar des* (land of the twelve forests, which is the land of the Bondas), where Soma Munduli had also been a *naik* or chief for a long time. The Bondas who are living in the mountains tucked away from outsiders by their *runukbore* or the Wall of the Bondas as the plainsmen call it, are still

maintaining their age old customs, while the Bondas who have settled in the plains have adopted the customs of the people they have come in contact with and have hybridized with the cultures of the plains people mixing their language *remo sam* with many other languages. Those who have settled in the plains are regarded as the lower Bondas and the upper Bondas have no respect for these people who have forfeited their culture, manner of dress and way of life. The lower Bondas on their part hated the Upper Bondas for being murderers. "A Bonda would not hesitate to kill a man, but interfering with a custom was another matter!" (PL: 44). While the lower Bondas increase in number the highland Bondas kill each other and are decreasing. But for Soma and the likes of him would never give up his mountains, and "...as a Bonda he never wanted to be born anywhere else. It was there that he must die so that he could be born a Bonda again." (PL: 63)

Most anthropologists wonder at the strange marriage system of the Bondas in which the wife is mostly ten years older to the husband. Eight to ten year old boys are married to women of twenty to twenty-five with the wife taking the role or caretaker of the boy till his maturity. Ray has linked this strange system to the myths and legendary tales of the Bondas. To understand a people one has to understand their myths and legends which are kept alive through oral tradition and serving as memory connects their past with the present. Myths in tribal societies are important, for the tribal is not generally affected by historical changes, but his myths are clear to him and he depends on them to guide him in his social knowledge which very often are linked to his religious thinking.

A long time ago the legendary queen of Chitrakot, Bundei Mahadei's beauty had allured the lustful eyes of the enemies along with the wealth of the kingdom. The king was deceived by his trusted minister and was killed. Budei had a son who was of ten

years old and she swore that she would take her revenge through her son. Budei was then twenty five. With four faithful warriors she escaped into the forest. In the wilderness she entered the Bonda country and lived among the Bondas and she was worshipped as the Mother. Budei found the Bondas to be as free as nature:

> They were nature's children – as open, as clear, as harsh and as exposed to nature. They did not know what falsehood was: they were as straight as the trees that grew on the mountains. As uncomplicated. If you were not a friend you were a foe. (PL: 5)

Budei taught the Bondas the art of warfare, and the Bondas even of five years took up arms to protect her. They became very skilled with the bow and arrow in particular, and it is symbolic that when a Bonda male is born, the umbilical cord is cut by the sharp point of an arrow. Till today the Bonda is feared when he carries his weapon around. The Bonda is suspicious by nature and suspects anyone other than himself, for the king of Chitrakot had been betrayed by his most trusted minister and if a trusted minister can betray, no one can be trusted. Ray connects the suspicious nature of the Bondas to this myth, and the marriage system that they follow can also be a reflection of Budei and her son.

A Bonda male who has crossed the age of fourteen finds it difficult to find himself a wife, since no *selani* (a more formal term used for young woman) would choose him for a husband. The myth behind this is that many years ago, a father-in-law pretending to be *Mahapru* (Bonda god) deceived his son's wife into sleeping with him, and since then no *selani* trusts a full grown man. The child is feeble in mind and body but once he becomes a man he is not to be trusted. So, after fourteen years of age, a man is considered to be a *dorka* (old man) and well past marriageable age. Also, the father of an eight year old boy is happy to let his son marry, for the Bonda man is not sure of life, but

of death he is confident, and so he makes all the provisions for death. He is ready to die any time and the father is happy that his son will not be orphaned if married. Ray implies that with the immaturity of her husband the Bonduni (female Bonda) is not barred from the comfort of the *selani dingo* (Communal dormitory for young women) or sometimes the warmth of her husband's elder relatives. Marriage with a young boy also ensures that she would have someone to look after her in her old age.

Like most tribes of India, the Bondas too have their Creation myth and in the novel Soma Munduli narrates the story

> Soma has heard that *his* ancestors were the first men to live on the earth. Whatever he has heard is history for him. To the Bonda, the truth of tribal memory is as indisputable as that of his own ancestors. The traces in the sands of Soma's memory may have dimmed with age, but they have not been erased. (PL: 6)

The first man (*puru*) and the first woman (*selani*) were born and god only knows how. The first man if he was born on a *Sombar* must have been named Soma and the first woman must have been Sanki if she was born on a *Sanibar*. For Bonda names are given on the basis of either their ancestors or the day of the week they are born, so there are many similar names which can be confusing for an outsider. When the *purusas* (men) and the *selanis* (women) increased they set up many *dias* (hut or home) and helped each other. When the *selanis* grew heavy they could not keep up with the *purusas* who roamed about and so looked after the *dias* and the *awn awns* (babies) and till today the *purusas* roamed and the *selanis* look after the *dias* and the *awn awns*.

Thus oral traditions play important roles in the life of a community as they are answers to why people behave in certain ways. When an oral culture changes to a written one and where education is given in a languge which is not used by the community, the

oral traditions of a community is under threat. It is often argued that translating an oral narrative tend to disintegrate the authenticity of the narrative, but unless these narratives are documented in one form or the other, they are under threat of being totally forgotten and lost.

A community places importance to certain objects, may be a plant or an animal which is again connected to the oral tradition of the community.The *salap* palm tree which is believed by the Bondas to posses a soul is a very precious tree. They believe that the first woman gave birth to twins and left them under the *salap* tree and forgot all about them. As the children howled in hunger it was the *salap* tree that spread its roots to the ocean which gave the tree plenty of water which began to have juice. The *salap* tree fed the babies with its juice. Thus, the *salap* tree remains a precious belonging for a Bondo for it gives him shade during the hot summer days and he continues to drink the juice which he cannot do without. He may mortgage his lands and children to the moneylender, but never a *salap* tree. And on the Bonda Mountains one can find boys without mothers, but a boy without a *salap* tree to his name is impossible to find.

> The juice of the salap is the Bonda's lifeblood as well as death. Filled with salap juice, or *sapung*, he becomes as strong as a tiger; but it also drives him mad. He is easily angered; he kills readily over the ownership of a salap tree. The salap has been the cause of murder, rioting, incarceration and hanging. Still, the Bonda's relationship to the salap is that of the flower to the stalk. An eternal link. The Earth Mother, he believes, has given him the salap to nurture him. (PL: 11)

Soma as the informant of the Bonda culture recounts the tale of the abandoned twins who became man and wife and had twelve sons and twelve daughters. The twelve brothers built twelve villages which made up the land of the Bondas. Its name till today is *bara jangar des* or land of the twelve forests. The twelve brothers all became *naiks* in

their respective villages but it is the eldest son Nangli Bonda who stayed in Mudulipara who was paramount. Thus is the story of the Bondaland and the Bondas having their own parallel history to documented history, have the answer to their collective consciousness.

Inspite of the fact that the Bondas are presented as primitive and barbarous, the Bondas have maintained their own unique way of administering themselves which proves that they are not the savages that are portrayed of them. It is believed that Queen Budei had influenced the Bondas into having their own system of administration where there is no ruler, and the chief is elected. The Bonda village is administered into four parts, controlled respectively by a *Naik* (headman), *Sisa* (priest), *Karsani* (general) and *Dhangramajhi* (watchman). In every Bonda village, there is a *sindbore*, a stone platform on which all public assemblages are held.

The Bondas have their own sense of religion which is animistic in character.The god they mainly worship is Patkhanda Mahapru, who turned into a stone and remains to this day under an ageless banyan tree. His spirit is believed to be dwelling inside the banyan tree. When he is displeased he travels away, and it is during this time that calamities befall the Bondas.

The ethnographic novel in tracing the memory of the community further gives information of the Bonda history and why the Bonda women remain naked except for a *ringa* or a short skirt which is a foot wide and three long to hide their shame. It is hand woven, dyed with vivid red, yellow, blue or green, with stripes of different hue, below the navel. It hangs from a waistband or *thumia*, a length of string tied round the waist; one end of the *ringa* is tucked into it at the front while the other is draped around the upper thigh. At the back, the *ringa* hangs across the buttocks. Their breasts are hidden by the numerous ornaments they wear. The Bonduni's manner of dressing herself is

connected with the mythical tale of Sita Takrani a goddess who had put a curse on the Bondunis. It is believed that once they did not walk so naked but that some Bondunis had answered the call of the hornbill with laugher while goddess Sita Takrani had been bathing naked in the Kingubodak stream. Thinking that they were laughing at her, in anger she cursed them

> The whole world shall laugh at you in the *kali* age, the evil times to come! Naked you shall be to every eye! And not a hair shall cover your heads; you shall walk with your heads shaven, bare from head to foot! But beware! If you try to cover up your nakedness or grow hair on your scalps, not a blade of grass will grow on these mountains! The Bonda people will be destroyed! (PL: 25)

When they cried and begged, the goddess pulled out a single thread from the border of her sari and told them to weave a small cloth to hide their shame and nothing more. So, till of late the *dhangris* adhere to their age old custom. Even the young though "young in body their minds carried the wrinkles of a thousand years of tribal belief" (PL: 174). Their belief that if they begin to cloth themselves, the curse of Sita Takrani would befall on the whole tribe clash with the dominant culture that tried to cloth them. To the Bonda men the Bondunis are all beautiful for they cover their bodies with ornaments and it is not the face that is important but strong bodies that would be able to take care of all the works.

The *selani dingo*, the female dormitory of the Bondas serves as a meeting ground for the *dhangras* and the *dhangris* to meet and find partners. The *selanis* since the age of five sleep there every night and *dhangras* from other villages come in search of partners for Bondas do not marry from their own village which is considered to be incestuous.The *dhangras* who are so much younger than the *dhangris* that they court are shy in their

presence for though fierce as he is, he sees the woman as his better, in age and in wisdom.

Ray does not project herself as a feminist, but in her works she is mainly concerned of the situations of women in various social circumstances. In the novel *Primal Land* too, she devotes a substantial space to describe the Bonda women and then moves to individual characters.The *dhangri* is described as precise in her accounting while the *dhangra* is born a spendthrift. The *dhangra* drinks in excess but the *dhangri* never gets drunk. Marriage does not teach the *dhanga* to be bold; it teaches him to be humble. The wedding night is not a night of bliss for the child bridegroom is helpless. For Soma it was a night of incompetence and numbness for he felt humbled and hopeless. The wife's duties on the other hand increases with marriage, for her husband needed more *sapung*, more clothing, more ornaments and he has to be supplied physically and mentally. If the husband is either killed or sent to prison it is the wife who bears the brunt of it.

Ray makes it a point to show that this social order has a disadvantage for the woman. Though it is often pointed out that tribal woman enjoys more privileges than that of the plains women, the Bonduni does not have the same privileges that the men enjoy. The *sindbore* which is a stone platform where the village council meet to settle affairs is exclusively male domain. She is always too busy anyway to contest the male domain. When jail returnees began to put on dhotis not much fuss is made, but when a Bonduni wants to wear a sari, the council has to be consulted for the fear of Sita Takrani's curse which can adverslely affect the whole community. No Bonduni occupies any of the important posts in the social order.

When a wedding takes place, the wife could have already conceived a child by someone else, as Soma's first wife did, which is no great deal. No child is ever

abandoned, for the husband becomes the father of the child. For, "the fruit belongs to the owner of the land, not to the one who sowed the seed. That is the established law!" (PL: 47) The baby of Soma's first wife was a joy for him and he was regarded with high esteem when he carried it around. When Soma's wife was eaten by a tiger, Soma felt that if he neglected her child her spirit would punish him in the form of a tiger, a snake or a disease. She would be watching him constantly.

Among the Bondas as Ray has portrayed it is common that the husband's father or his elder brother to having an affair with the new bride. Right from his helplessness at the wedding night, the Bonda man remain suspicious. However, if someone tells him that his wife is involved in an affair he may burn silently but keep quite. He does not trust his ears, only his eyes and if he personally sees his wife with his father or brother, then he will kill with his bow and arrow, axe or scythe. His suspicious nature and his uncontrollable anger often prompt him to murder, for:

> To the Bonda, the killing of a human being is neither crime nor sin. He who causes another to anger dies; he who is angered kills: thus it has been for countless generations. It is not the feeling of guilt which makes the assassin surrender to the police, it is the hope of escaping vengeance. But seldom is there any escape: revenge is a sacred trust passed on from one generation of the Bondas to the next. The assassin may come home after fourteen years in prison only to be hunted down by the murdered man's grandson. (PL: 73)

To the strange marriage system the Bonduni believes that she would have someone to look after her in her old age. The father-in-law or the brother-in-law would be nearer in age, strong and manly while her husband would be just a child which can be quite distracting for the Bonduni. The author's musing is betrayed in the lines, "Why does the Bonduni get into such marriage? And then, a lifetime of stolen assignations, haunted by nagging fears. But she cannot protest: the tribe has its law" (PL: 123).

The Bonda like other members of the tribes of India depends on the shifting cultivation or the *poru*. Sowing and reaping in the mountains is filled with uncertainty, for

> ...the soil is as fickle as a *dhangri's* mind....when a tree is felled the earth begins to sulk, for the earth is the forest's mother, the *yong* (mother)...the meagre harvest seldom justifies the labour (PL: 64).

What has remained unmentioned by the author is how the tribe had survived in this system for ages, before the intervention of outside forces and the system of money lending became a way of life.

Unlike the *sahukar* or the moneylender of the plains who is usually a *sundhi* or brewer caste, the *sahukar* among the Bondas is either a Domb or one amongst them. The *sahukar* sometimes is very poor himself and is neither friend nor foe; he is a necessity in the Bondo's life who gives him money when he is in need. The Bonda's expensive ceremonies, the post-mortem expenses he has to pay, the ornaments he has to buy to win a *selani*, and the bride-price which he mostly cannot afford. He pledges his land, his fruits, sometimes his wife and children to the *sahukar*. The *sahukar* would be glad to have the daughter, for girls are found to be hard working while boys are lazy, and the *sahukar* can claim the girl's bride-price. Once the Bonda pledges himself to the *sahukar*, he can never redeem himself, for he never has enough money to repay his loan. The Bondas say, as the moon wane it fades until there is nothing left "so does the Bonda if he once becomes a debtor. The debt increases from generation to generation" (PL: 66). The Bonda is aware of this, but this knowledge does not stop him to unhesitatingly to the *sahukar's* door, for there can be no festivity, no celebration or mourning without the *sahukar's* loan. For, "There are no misers and hoarders in the Bonda tribe: what the

Bonda brings home is consumed the same day. And shared. Tomorrow is uncertain" (PL: 156).

There are two instances when the Bonda makes contact with the outside world, and ironically these two instances are where he manages some semblance of education. One instance is when he goes to jail. Another is when he goes to work in the Tea Gardens of Assam. The jail returnee is viewed as an educated man among the Bondas and looked upon with respect by the younger *dhangras*. In jail he meets hardened criminals and learns their language. He even learns to count, learns a few letters of the alphabet and Oriya, with a little bit of Hindi and English. He learns to wear *lungi* and shirt and smoke *biri* and drink hot *sha*. Some return with umbrellas and use it instead of the *tarla* the local shade and brandish a torch even when the battery finishes. He learns to shake hands city-fashion. "These were the fore- runners; they knew the world!" (PL: 120). The same goes with the one who returns from the Tea gardens of Assam. This is how the Bondas get their education and ironically,

> It is death that invites civilisation into the Bonda mountains. A man has to die before another can become civilised, educated. The murderer goes to jail for twelve-fourteen years.... The Bonda considers his years in jail well spent: he knows what it is to sit under an electric light, to travel in a bus on a tarred road. He comes back rich in wisdom, which he can share with his tribesmen. (PL: 115)

The myths belonging to the Bondas has similarity with the myths of other tribes that live nearby for myths have ways of travelling, and the origin often contested. The Dombs could have also been the influence, for with his busy mind and body, he has a far greater knowledge than the Bondas. According to Verrier Elwin, in *Bondo Highlanders* (1950) the Dombs are "important agent of culture-change" (21) of the Bondas, who make

themselves familiar in the plains as well as on the mountains, and can speak different languages. With his sly mind and glib tongue he has a way of perpetuating

> ...quarrel with their lies and deceit. The simple Bondas and Parajas never fathomed their treachery; they trusted the outsider rather than their own blood. The Dombs knew how to talk smoothly, but the Bonda's talk was blunt, rough (PL: 62).

The Domb is the Bonda's eyes and ears. The Bondas can communicate with the *gulang babus* or the government officials only through the Dombs who knows his language. The Domb could easily interpret the conversation in any way as he pleases for his own gains.

> There was great unity among the Dombs: together, they conspired to give the Bonda a bad name. The Bonda inspired so much terror among the plainsmen that no one dared to come to his country. The Dombs enjoyed a monopoly (PL: 95).

Ray indicates through her narrative that the Dombs are one influence in bringing the cultural disintegration of the Bondas. After the Dombs entered the Bonda habitat and began to influence the Bondas they became aggressive on their trips to the plains which have adversely affected their reputation as wild savages. The Dombs served as *barik* or messenger for the Bondas and are paid for it. After the Dombs entered the Bondaland, other tribes and castes followed with the help of the Dombs. Thus, the *gulang babus* began to enter the Bonda country with mixture of duty, fear and dread. As crimes and murders were plenty, the police had to write reports, so they had to climb the mountains with their guns, flashlights and umbrella, with dread of the Bondas. The Dombs would act as interpreter and mediator. They told the Bondas that just as the gods and *dumas* and witches they have to placate the babus and humour them with gifts of meat, eggs and liquor. They also told the Bondas that once their names were in the *gulang khata* or

government records, the government would take their lands away and force them to work as *gotis*. The Bondas feared their guns and in the eyes of the officials the Bonda is "a cruel, drunken beast – barely a human" (PL: 91)

The Bonda when enraged goes on a rampage creating tension for the other tribes and the plainsmen and is therefore feared. In spite of this reputation

> The Bonda announces himself as he is, does exactly what he claims to be doing. Since the beginning of time, truth and falsehood have been irreconcilable (PL: 287).

Ray presents a parallel narrative that reveals the Bondas as honest and unpretensious, who make no attempt to lie to save their heads even when they commit crimes. They s do not lock their doors, neither do they have boxes to put money and nothing is stolen. Yet the plainsmen regard them as thieves. Their acute sense of honesty is sometimes the police and the lawyer's despair. But the identity that the Bondas are forced to carry is something else for they have been recorded as a Criminal tribe by the Colonial government.

When other people like the reformers and missionaries began to enter the Bonda country, the Bonda became more suspicious for everyone according to him was trying to change him. He does not understand why the Hindus drink milk but refrained from eating beef, for to him drinking milk was worst than drinking their blood. He is angered when the Christian called their god false, angry when the Muslim told him not to eat pig and to have only one God and not Mahapru. He feels that if he does not offer *biru* (ritual sacrifice offered to a diety) to all the gods, they would curse him.

> As every visitor to the Bonda country had attempted to change him, the Bonda was convinced of a conspiracy to destroy the tribe. This made him cling all the more fiercely to his beliefs: all doors and windows were shut against the winds of civilisation (PL: 91).

Indeed one is reminded of what Verrier Elwin had repeated in many of his works that integration is inevitable and should be so, but it must come in small doses. His prediction in his pamphlet *The Aboriginal* (1943) is proved to be true in many cases regarding the aboriginal tribes and in the case of the Bondas as well, which Ray has projected through her novel.

When the government set up a project for the development of the Bondaland, an office was set up in Mudulipara. Three Bondunis came to work there. They were ordered to wear saris and grow their hair. Adibari Toki, Sombari Toki and Mangla Toki driven by problems and poverty came to work in the project office. After consulting the *pansati*, Adibari became the first woman to wear a sari and by this act she is the first *dhangi* to challenge the tribe's law and breaking thousands of years of Bonda history. By her act according to Ray, she "had helped to bring civilisation to the mountains; for after all, civilisation is founded on the denial of natural laws" (PL: 194).

Ray could have quoted these words tongue in cheek. For with this comment Adibari is made to feel that the sari has become a prison as she lost the *dhangri's* natural forthrightness and spontaneity. She did not want to go to the *dingo* any more for the other *selanis* were awkward with her. She felt that she neither belongs to the mountains nor the plains. When she refused to name the father of her unborn child and strangled it in the mountains she yet broke another natural law. With Ray projecting her pathetic life after what she has done, she seems to have been punished for the crimes that she had committed. When she fled with her lover her people believed that she had been devoured by a tiger and felt that such had to happen. "Was it surprising that the first sari-clad woman become the tiger's prey? The sin had been atoned for" (PL: 195). The Bondas

have their own way of understanding justice by believing that the gods avenge through sickness and misfortune, and the spirit in the tiger haunts the misbehaved Bonduni. Would one call her a tragic character or a villain who meets her just end by challenging the gods which is regarded as a crime? Age old way of understanding life is hard to die and guilt still punishes her in her miserable life. There is still a part of her to the end which respects her homeland and traditional belief when she tells her friends,

> ... tell my *yong* (mother) that I'm waiting for death. My spirit will return to the mountain to meet her. But it will go only as far as the *runukbore*. I cannot go back into the sacred land to pollute it with my presence (PL:199).

For Sombari, "her dreams melted away. Tradition won" (PL: 205). She had dreamt of getting married to a *babu* of the city. Understanding that no babu would marry her, she gave up her sari, shaved her head, married a typical Bonda man and returned back to traditional life. Yet she learnt that to be educated was a necessity and later with great determination she sent her brother Mangla to study, who became the first matric pass amongst the Bondas and the highest true educated and not the jail educated way.

Mangli in her turn refused to give up her sari and went on to work in the project office. No *dhangra* courted her and she remained unmarried. She would have liked to marry an educated person from the lower Bonda, yet she refused to leave her homeland. She remains clinging to both worlds. Neither here nor there she bravely maintains her own individuality within a cultural context.

After her husband was killed in the Bonda fashion Lachchma Toki in grief and fear for her child went down to the plains to live there. Though she lived in the plains, unlike other lower Bondunis she remained wearing a *ringa* and continued to shave her head in spite of people ridiculing her. She felt that if she gave up her customs, the feared curse

will befall on her people in the mountains. So, she bravely endured anger, disgust and ridicule. She eventually chose to die in the mountains, and till her end she occupied a place in Soma Munduli's heart as a respectful woman who remained faithful to her tradition.

Budei Toki, wife of Bagha Bindhu was heartbroken when her husband went to jail just a year after their marriage. She like many other Bondunis had to suffer through the period of their husbands' imprisonment. Many other Bondunis married other men and when their husbands return from jail, they find that they have lost everything, wife and lands. Budei remained faithful, worked laboriously alone in their land and faithfully looked after her husband's belongings pledging nothing to the *sahukar*. Even Bagha Bindhu admired her as a wonderful wife. He knew that Budei must have really struggled to maintain lands and possessions during his absence. Yet years had made Budei a *dorki* (old). In spite of all the hard work she had put in during her husband's absence, her husband eyed their daughter-in-law, whose husband still clung to his *yong*. When Baga Bindhu brings home a *Chhotli* or a junior wife, Budei is dismayed. Her anger and scream of, "just because I am old, do you think I have no rights?" (PL: 181) ironically gives her no claim for such right, for Tribal laws do not provide her with such a right. Baga Bindhu gave her a *longsi* (divorce) and she had to leave without any protests. She leaves her *dia* and everything that she had worked so hard to maintain to an uncertain future. Her father and male members of her family come making a great commotion, killing and feasting on Bagha Bindu's domestic animals, but make no move to take back Budei. For,

> Youth is the Bonduni's sole asset; when it is gone she is welcome nowhere. No one needs her – not husband, father, brother or son (PL: 183).

Budei's life reflects the irony of marrying very young husbands. The Bondunis believe that they would have someone to look after them when they become a *dorky* but such belief is an irony in the case of Budei. However traditions die hard. Budei is also grieved to see her son go to jail, even though he never helped her. She lets her daughter-in-law come to live with her which is actually not done in the Bonda system.

In portraying the character of Budei, Ray as a woman writer and concerned about situations of women in various social circumstances is critical of both tradition and the government's insensitivity towards women like her. Budei is a victim of her tribal customs and also of the laws of the government for she is not even eligible for the governmental provision for aged and widowed Bondunis, for her husband was still living. Again Ray points out that she couldn't have received much either, for the Dombs would have claimed half. As a gendered subaltern, the tribal woman is seen by Ray as a victim of her traditions and hounded by people who want to take advantage of her helplessnesss.

By introducing many women characters in this novel, Ray portrays the lives of the Bondunis in various circumstances. When we begin to understand characters, we become closer to them and sympathies with their life experiences. This is where the ethnographic novel plays its role, by exposing individual narratives that are not documented in dominant narratives. The ethnographic narrative helps us to understand lived experiences of individuals within a culture. The ethnographic novel with its scientific origin and its realistic mode of narrative production becomes a documented history of the people it portrays. The women who came to first don the sari in their own way created Bonda history. Ironically they found themselves neither belonging to the world of the plainsman nor to their people. Yet they paved the way for younger people to learn and educate

themselves. Lachchma Toki who fled to the plains to protect her son is regarded with respect for remaining a traditional Bonduni by remaining comfortable with her traditional beliefs and customs to the end. Yet she had to witness her son drifting away from Bonda way of life by marrying a younger woman who does not dress in Bonda traditional wear. Budei is also a woman of substance in her own way. Her suffering is a reflection of the many Bondunis who meet similar fates, yet cannot change their customs even when tribal laws are sometimes hard on the woman. The government also fails to protect their lot when the Bondunis are in need of help. It is the ethnographic novel that shows us an alternative way of living other than our own, and what it is to be a human being within an alternative tradition where individuals are affected by traditions and changes.

Interestingly Ray's representation of the sexual life of the Bondunis has been criticised by other tribal groups, while the Bondas remain silent. Verrier Elwin has given a different account in his *Bondo Highlander* (1953) wherin he had written that the Bondas have many taboos about sex. In his interview with several Bondas and drawing from their accounts he says that the Bondunis are not so easily made to consent to male advances. Many of the Bondas have revealed to him how they have confronted severe blows by the heavily ornamented hands of the Bondunis. Elwin's conclusion is that the women are undersexed for which they choose young boys for husbands who will not bother them.

As with the examples of the Gonds and Parajas, confrontation between a stronger culture and a weaker one leads to the disintegration of the weaker one, the Bondas find their traditional ways being threatened with the entry of outside forces. The 'civilised' gaze on the 'primitive' is inherent, and the 'civilised' makes it his duty to change the 'uncivilised' to his ways. Like Elwin and Mohanty, Ray sees the inevitable. While Elwin

and Mohanty romanticised the primordial life that is slowly disintegrating, Ray's narrative is practical and down to earth. She gives no space for romanticising with lyrical lines. Her prose does not give way to emotionalism and nostalgia as she directly portrays governmental apathy and the gross corruption that occur in the name of developing the tribals. Though she sympathises with the tribals, in her direct prose style she reveals her despair over the Bondas for their lack of methods in competing with the forces that have invaded their territories.

Soma who remained for a long time the *naik* is a man respected in his community for he retains the ancient knowledge of the tribe. Bagha Bindu becomes the new *naik* after Soma felt old and tired. As a personification of a younger generation of the Bondas, Baga Bindhu did not match Soma in his nobility and is almost the antithesis of Soma. While Soma refused to kill anyone and is always grieved when somebody kills someone, for it is his fear that the whole tribe would perish. On the other hand Budha alias Baga Bindhu is sent to jail for fourteen years for murder. Instead of feeling guilty for killing Mangla, he blames Mangla for making him go to jail. On his return he roared at Sania Madra, Mangla's son

> Fouteen years I've spent in jail because of your father Mangla Madra and now I've had to part with my lands and cattle to re-join the tribe! My wife has turned *dorki*. All because of your father Mangla Madra, that eater of dung, eater of his wife's shit! I had to kill him because he made me angry. It was his fault, not mine". (PL: 119)

Bagha Bindu's years in jail made him an educated man in the eyes of his peers and is respected. He brings in a different knowledge and value system to the community to that of Soma's. Soma had great respect for women like Lachchma Toki who remaind a true Bonduni till her end though she had refused to marry him.

Bagh Bindu on the other hand has no qualms about divorcing Budei who had remained a hardworking wife, struggling to look after everything in his absence. He had brought in a new and younger wife home and hoped that she would work in the Project Office and the leader babu would lend him money to buy bullocks so that he can plough his new wife's husband's lands, for the man was in jail. However Bagha Bindu did not possess the intelligence of managing his life and lost all his lands and became a *goti*. Although he is no fool he laid his trust on the cunning Domb Tanko Khemudi who was instrumental in making him loose his possessions. He is also straightforward, for according to Ray, in general, the Bonda is as straight as a sword's edge while the Domb is devious.

Bagha Bindu personifies the Bonda man who though wary of the *babus* is helpless to the temptations and greed for money and who are slowly depending on the money that the *babus* can give. He personifies the Bonda man who is slowly disintegrating from his tribal respectful ways, which he himself seems to have a growing awareness as he agonizes over the predicament that his people's fate,

> Now *he* would be responsible for the survival of the tribe which, he realised, was in danger. He knew at first hand the vicious world below which lay waiting to engulf the remos: he had spent fourteen years in jail with criminals and murderers. But the leader babu represented a new threat... gifts of money, seeds, medicines, clothes....Gifts that they would find difficult to refuse. Why was the sarkar bringing them so many gifts? Who gives anything without a motive?...When a Bonda finds another remo in need, it becomes his duty to give, to share. Since the Dumas observe everything, every selfish act is witnessed by them and punished. If a remo has failed to help a neighbour in his need, the Dumas will seize him and cause him harm: he will be struck with disease, or his crops will wither. But the sarkar was giving things away unasked! The remo needed to be careful. (PL: 157)

Times have become difficult for Bagha Bindu, who sees the slow degradation of his people but is helpless. He felt that all that had once belonged to them was passing to alien hands - the forest, the birds and beasts, the sky, mountains, villages, the moonlight - their gods as well. The Bondas were being robbed and humiliated in the *haats* (weekly market). When the fruits ripen the *babus* would claim them, took them to the capital as exhibition to show how well they have taught the Bondas to cultivate. When a Bonda burnt down a tree he was blamed and fined, while the *babus* cut down the best trees to make furniture. Each *babu* came to the mountains with just a suitcase but went back with truck loads of belongings. Helpless he drowns himself into his liquor, for with liquor he can drown himself into a deep sleep where there is neither hunger nor sorrow, thus furthering his disintegration.

If Bagha Bindu is confused, more so are the young men who got educated in the true sense. Mangla did not adjust well in school, but managed to sit for the Matric exams and failed, but he is regarded as educated by his people. He settled in the plains and married a *Bonduni* who wore a sari and grew her hair like a *Dombuni* (Domb woman). When he came up on the mountains to give the message that Lachchma was dying, Bagha Bindu points a finger at him and says:

> Mangla is one of our educated dhangras: he went to school in Gobindpalli...He is not one of us now because he is educated. But the city babus do not want him as he is a Bonda. He belongs to no one. So he wants us to find a way out for him, so that wherever he lives he can still be a Bonda (PL: 210).

Mangla's sister Mangli had made sure that he should be educated and get a job. Mangla wanted to be a teacher but became a peon instead in a Bonda school. Mangla's decision to live a different way of life breeds discontent on the more traditional minded

tribal such as Bagha Bindu who is in a dilemma as to accept him in the tribe or not. Change and transition even if it is for the better, breeds discontent on the ones who want to cling on to old order of things. However Mangla's education in the city makes him more enlightened among his peers and the younger Bondas look upon him as a leader. Education enlightens a person into being more critical minded and he and other youths begin to question many things and not taking things for granted.

Somra, Katu's son was also sent to school in Gobindpalli. Since none of the schools in Bondaland functioned, he achieved a false certificate from the teacher Khara Babu who demanded chicken and vegetables, to enable him to go to a bigger school. Thus, corruption in its many forms becomes rampant to become an accepted phenomenon. Ironically, Suprabha Didi the only sincere teacher in the area is suspended for the fact that she had not been feeling well and had gone home just before the Deputy Director of Education had made a flying visit. Ray as an educationist reveals her serious concern in the matter. She accounts in detail passages from governmental files and compares it to ground reality and the lack of seriousness on the part of the government in uplifting the Bondas. She puts basic eduction and medical care as most important in developing the tribes before building roads and fancy development programs that are for the benefit of outsiders.

In high school Mangla was taught the distinction between *Arya* (Arian) and *Anarya* (non-Aryans). That the ideology of *Arayan* supremacy has not changed and concept of the Tribal has not changed for all these thousands of years is experienced by him. He was made to work just like a *goti* for his teachers who made sure that his being a tribal had angered them because of the privileges and provisions that the government had made for the Tribal. It is not through harsh words or physical abuses that the message is sent, but

through attitudes and gestures. The tribal students were not taught as much as the other children but were usually made to pass. Somra would have turned out to be quite intelligent, but his lack of primary education and the attitudes of his high school teachers did not help him to be at a level with the non-tribal students. He "became aware of the contempt behind this kindness" (PL: 233). He became depressed and tells Mangla:

> I am not happy in school and I am not happy here. There, everyone makes fun of me, treats me with contempt; here, I find everyone wild, uncivilised. Everyone here is an object of charity, living on the government's scrap! We cannot speak out! (PL: 235)

This discontentment amongst the youth especially those who went to be educted among the non-tribals reveal the fact that there is no post in colonialism for the Bondas and that the Tribal is still regarded as 'other' by the mainstream Indians. The ethnographic novel connects the contemporary disillusion and discontentment amongst the youth to the past. With the changing narrative of ethnography from discovery of a people, the narrative of this novel brings forth the story of domination and subordination that is a continuation of the past. The Bondas are going through change and the question that hangs is will their culture survive the onslaught of stronger ones. Ray's narrative invariably attempts to make the Bondas speak out through this ethnographic novel.

As the government made projects, an office had to be set up. The first officer to arrive was Sitanath. In spite of all the warnings he received from his city friends he came to the mountains with determination to work for the Bondas. He won their respect because he could plough better than them. He was determined to stop the *goti* system. He saw with his own eyes the state of poverty in the mountains. The system of cultivation was destroying the lands and so harvests were poor and most of them lived on roots, leaves and worms. Most of the families were in one way or the other pledged to the

sahukar. Their homes and villages were filthy and insanitary; their children were malnourished and crawling with diseases. Whatever steps for education undertaken was a failure. While listening to the radio one day, of violence that was happening in different parts of the country, he saw and reflected on the irony of the whole situation and felt that he himself represented the civilised world and that

> ..... prided itself on its refinement. He had been sent to civilise these primitive, barbaric people, to educate them in the ways of the modern world! They stood before him now – naked, filthy, beastial. Yet they felt disgraced when one of them told a lie! They would sacrifice themselves for the tribe; its traditions were sacred to them (PL: 155).

He felt that it was his duty to educate and enlighten these people, but what came to his mind was who needed to be educated?

Sitanath tried to win the trust of the Bondas and tried to make them responsible for their own development, utilising existing tribal systems and networks, with governmental aids and incentives. He made the Bondas cultivate fruits so that their income would be raised. He had other original ideas to help the Bondas but he had to follow orders from the government. Finally his transfer to an insignificant post inspite of his well meaning attitude towards the tribe reflects the general apathy of people in power to really work for the good of the tribe.

Sitanath's character is a ray of hope that would have bridged the gap between the two sides but ironically, he is also caught in the same web of systems and situations, shaped by the dominant structures of his time. He was sympathetic and sensitive towards the need of the tribe. His sympathy may be on the verge of being patronising for he saw through their 'savage' covering, the fear and the child-like nature. He felt that they "had

to be won over as a shy child is won over, with gifts of toys and sweets" (PL: 149). He understood that:

> These Bondas were not as bad as they were made out to be. Child-like and excitable they might be, but they were not the beasts that the towns-people said they were. Who was perfect anyway? Were there only saints in the plains below? (PL: 139)

He saw the barriers of suspicion and hatred that existed between the Bondas and the outside world that grew worst with the passing of years:

> In the government records, the Bondas were still described as a "criminal tribe" – a label which the British rulers had invented and used whenever they found a group of people resisting their efforts to subjugate them. The British had gone but their successors had proved to be no more understanding or sympathetic. The army of officials and petty bureaucrats in the plains below were totally apathetic: people like Khara Babu, who had lived among the Bondas and could have helped them, were interested only in exploiting them. All that the Bondas had seen of the government was the guns of the police; if the administration had a benign face, they had yet to see it. To them any visitor from the world below was an enemy (PL: 138).

Sitanath knew he was alone with no one to help. Being just a cog in a machine there is very little that he can do, for in spite of the government's policy to preserve the Bonda's traditions, officials, politicians, social workers and journalists were all working against preserving their traditions. Researchers came to investigate about the Bondas but they seldom went round to really see ground reality by staying only in the rest house in Mudulipara. No one really tried to understand the Bondas. No one really cared for their hunger and poverty. How many children died of malnutrition, nor how many *dhangaras* died of feuds? When the *gulang babus* started coming in numbers and feasts were arranged in their honour, no one really tried to neither understand the Bonda nor consult him as to his needs. The Bonda is made to be silent, as "The *babus* observed the Bondas from a distance, blocked out the unpleasant odour by holding handkerchiefs" (PL: 179)

Through her detailed ethnographic account, Ray's fictional narrative brings forth vital issues mainly of governmental policies and its implimentations towards the development projects in the Bonda area, especially of the officials who are sent to implement the developmental programs for the Bondas. "The mountain tribes dwelt above while civilisation reigned below" (PL: 127).

The Bondas experienced many new things in the course of the narrative. They were exposed to the system of voting for leaders. During electioneering many *netas* or political leaders came to the Bondoland and made many promises but disappeared after they had been voted. While the Bondas needed proper education and food the government was interested in building roads which greatly benefited the contractors. Many roads functioned in paper only. And in the course of time, the local Bondas were refused work, and workers from other places were brought in. The Bondas realised that the lower Bondas and the Dombs were reaping the benefits more than themselves. The very people they had considered lower than themselves were beginning to rise above them, while they remain poor and neglected.

The prevalence of drought in the area made many stomachs hungry. Committees were created to look into the matter, but they were all a sham. According to Orrissa Relief Code an area to be called a drought area, fifty percent of crops have to be destroyed. Crop means rice or millet, but the Bonda's diet does not depend wholly on rice and millet, so the area could not be declared as a drought area. Plenty of tube wells were dug, but none produced water. Much money benefitted the privileged while the needy remained hungry and thirsty.

The young and more enlightened Bondas are disillusioned. Somra being a matriculate amongst the Bondas wanted to be a clerk in the project office for he felt that

he could help the officer into identifying the Bonda's needs. Such was not to happen; as another young man from the plains was appointed as clerk for he helped the officers to procure more money in their pockets.

Ray brings out the issue of reservation in her narrative which became a hot and sensitive topic during the 1980s. She reflects it through the experience of Somra in his student life. He did not feel any sense of elation when he got a seat in a college in the city, while many *Arya* students who were better than him did not get seats. He could not understand why the government showed such kindness. He felt that such:

> Kindness bred inequality and inequality generated fire. With fire, equality was restored. But the equality that fire created was only a handful of ashes. Could new life come from ashes?The fire that raged in the capital, New Delhi, as well as in every corner of the country was directed against Somra, Buda, Mangla and other groups of people, tribal as well as non-tribal, who had been deprived, depressed, subjugated for centuries. Those who had to compete for education and employment were agitating against those for whom places were reserved. Privilege was waging war against privilege; the old order fought the new. (PL: 236)

Envy, intolerance and hatred that surrounded them were not an easy feeling. The agitations seem to point fingers on Somra and his likes, "You are the cause! You are responsible!", or, "You have been given a place in the college; you will be given a job when you pass. But can you escape your tribal identity? Can you pass for a civilised Arya?" (PL: 236). Somra and the others could only wish that a day would come when they would no longer need any one's charity and not deprive others of their rights. Somra felt that his position would not be secured through reservation

> The Bonda's position was not going to improve through the goverment's charity. He would always be exploited in the name of progress. His future could not be secured through reservation. He would have to claim his due, fight for his rights, though his weapons had been taken away. (PL: 237)

Some angry *adivasi* students went to a minister accosting him why they were still under the category of the backward class. The Minister's reply was so shrewd that it baffled them. His reply was:

> Brothers and sons, listen to me! You can progress only if you are backward! If you reach your goal at the very beginning, what motivation can you have? Don't you walk backwards for the start of your run when you are competing in the Long Jump? It's the same principle in life! We keep you in the category of the backward so that you may get the chance to progress. You can move upwards only from a point below! (PL: 266)

Somra left the college for good, in between strikes and *bandhs*. However he came to understand that the most important means of weapon is proper education from primary level. His thought reflects the author's concern who is herself an educationist.

With the uneasiness that the reservation brought forth, the museumising attitude of the *gulang babus* and that of city dwellers also evoked uneasiness among the youth,

> The Bonda Mountain had become a tourist resort. Each day, visitors arrived in hoards with cameras and note-books, supposedly to gather facts about the Bondas and their progress. Producers of films were coming to make documentaries (PL: 239).

The Bondas were on show. "Was the Bonda country a zoo then?" (PL: 269) Somra remembers his visit to the Nandan Kanan zoo where the animals were on show.

> Now the tourists from the plains would come to see the Bonda beasts, wouldn't they? To olge bare breasts, to pry Bonda homes. To be entertained. (PL: 269)

A Bonduni's back are photographed with patterns of carpets in the background supposedly to be woven by the Bondunis. Some were honoured by receiving three hundred rupees a month to be on show whenever a VIP came to visit. Even the horticultural produce from the Bonda Mountain was awarded the top prize and the

Bondas didn't even see it when it was grown. People must have thought that the Bondas were living on choice fruits and vegetables.

When Sombari worked with the project, she was in great demand to be photographed to show the progress of the Bondas. And:

> Each year on the twentysixth of January, Indias's Republic Day, there was an exhibition of tribal artefacts in Bhubaneswar. All the aboriginal tribes of Orissa were represented: their cattle, the vegetables and fruits they grew, the produce from their forests, such as resin, honey, tiger skins, bear tails, and deer-heads, were exhibited together with the young men and women. The huts in which the tribals lived, the gods they worshipped, the sacrifices they performed, their food and dresses, were all depicted through models, photographs and paintings. Crowds of visitors came to the exhibition. These tribes inhabited another planet; it was natural to be curious.
>
> The young *dhangras* and *dhangris* entertained their guests by staging tribal dances. Then Sombari, Mangli and the other *dhangris* had to exchange their saris for ringas and beads; the *dhangras* shed their shirts and trousers, dropped their books and pens and took up arms again on stage. The dances had to be authentic. (PL: 198)

With all the progress that came along, the Bondas became increasingly difficult to manage. Their contacts with the outside world had made the half-educated *dhangras* cunning and outspoken. Being naturally lazy, they now expect the government to pay them wages and subsidies round the year, even when no work was done. Through all these confusions,

> Somra, Mangla and the other half-educated Bondas were unable to fathom the mysteries of government-funded development. Year after year, the money flowed in streams, but the Bonda remained as uncivilised as ever (PL: 242).

The project reports were well manipulated by the Project officer for the committee to see when they came up to inspect. The Bonda's opinions were never taken nor were they asked what their needs were. They had no say in the matter of their own development for they were not considered worthy of consulting. As more enlightened

ones emerged amongst them they began to speak out but were easily shoved aside. Soma the respected and eldest member of the tribe remains helpless to the changes that have taken place in his territory. His agedness and his inability to comprehend the changes is in contrast with the times when no outsiders resided in their lands and he was respected and listened to all the members of his tribe. Somra's anger and frustration was the result of the helplessness he felt in not being able to protect his tribe inspite of his education. He is further frustrated by false charges against him and treated with disrespect when he tried to speak out for his people. With his bow and arrow the Bonda was feared, but without any weapons he is a target of bully.

The collapse of the buildings of the Indira Awas that killed the poor residents of the building exposes the callousness of the officials and the contractors who showed no concern and respect for the Bondas. Under The Indira Awas eight one-roomed houses were constructed to provide homes for the homeless and the poorest of the poor. According to the leader babu the houses had been built with twenty-five thousand rupees each. He was willing to give money for those who would occupy the houses for he wanted the houses to be occupied before the committee would come to inspect. For the Bondas, the houses had no central pillar for the ancestors and no *biru* or ritual had been performed when they were built. The houses would not have lasted more than one monsoon anyway, in the manner in which the contractor had built them. When the buildings collapsed among the residents who lost their lives were Sanki, Somra's sister and Budei's pregnant daughter-in-law, Adibari Toki's mother and blind sister.

The Bonda is known as a savage and is beastly to the plainsman; this reputation is not entirely true. When Katu's pregnant *Chhotli* while returning home from the *haat* was

beaten to death by the police and the contractor's men, the Bondas were shocked at the act, for

> When a Bonda is angry with another Bonda he vents his anger at the enemy, not his wife or daughter. A woman is respected as the mother. But in the plains it is the women who suffer when their men fight: they are humiliated, raped and killed. To those living in towns, atrocities on women are commonplace, but to the Bondas the killing of Chhotli and her unborn child was an unspeakable horror, an outrage. (PL: 290)

The Bonda may kill, but he does not lack affection and warmth. He grieves for the sorrow of his fellowmen. But to the plainsman, "the Bonda was less human; and so they saw in him only the flames, not the perennial steams of love" (PL: 292). The Bondas marched down the mountain to protest the crime with Somra's leadership but Somra is falsely accused of the crime by the police, beaten up and put in jail. The local M.L.A. took no pains to protect them and instead issued a statement that the 'Bondas are a criminal tribe' and that no outsider was involved in the crime. When Somra's father appeased the M.L.A. with bribes he declares that his heart bleeds for his brethren and got Somra out of jail. Somra's dreaded father the *sahukar* had been cheated out of his money and lands, to get Somra out of jail. To the Bonda what had been narrated in the myths about the King of Chittrakot becomes a reality even as their M.L.A. instead of protecting them, trecherously betrayes them. For,

> The only ministers the Bondas had heard of, whose stories had been woven into their legends, had been imposters who betrayed their monarchs and usurped their thrones by treachery. And were they ruling the country now? (PL: 295)

The writer gives an unsettling ending to the novel as an ethnographer who predictics the future of a tribe that is on the verge of extinction. Ray through her ethnographic novel has presented a history of a tribe connecting it to their inability to

move along with others to the changes that come by. This she illustrates through the symbolic ending of the novel. Somra the youth leader is helpless, angy, grieved and frustrated and seeing his pregnant dead sister under the collapsed building the violent nature that is inherent in the Tribal comes to the fore. Unable to attack the real enemy, he vents out his frustration by blaming Soma for the sufferings of the whole tribe and shoots him with his bow and arrow in the true Bonda fashion of revenge. He is also shot by a *gulang babu*, and the tribe's past and present lay dead on the mountain. At that moment Somra's wife gives birth to a male child who will continue the race. But as the old order dies, and the present is helpless, the future does not comprehend a rosy picture for if the Bondas do not formulate a means to be united in confronting their enemy instead of killing one another, their future remains uncertain.

The Bonda's story is not an isolated story. It is a story of many groups of people in India, be it pre-colonial, colonial or post-independence. Whereas the Bonda faces the outsider who brings changes to his isolated life in post-independent India, the Munda's story of outside domination dates far back to pre-colonial times. Mahasweta Devi brings out many disturbing issues that prevail upon the marginalised of our post colonial independent India. Her works are a challenge to what she believes is the myth of our democracy and nationhood that has excluded so many in sharing the fruits of independence and economic growth.

Ever since Mahasweta Devi resorted to creative writing, it is evident in her works that she wishes to challenge dominant history by openly confronting official history written by the dominant class, where many have been left out. She thus through her writings creates an alternative history where the main characters are the subalterns – the economically and politically subjugated, mainly the untouchables and the tribals.

Representing the Tribal, she merges myths and documented realism to bring out the Tribal's own narrative. Through her years of social activism she has had immense and thorough knowledge of the tribals mainly those who live around the areas of Palamau, Murshidabad, Medinipur and Purulia. In her campaign for tribal mobilization she mainly focuses on issues of bonded labour, industrial exploitation, education and the planning and implementation of development schemes thus her representation is regarded as authentic enough, since her experience and fieldwork is immense.

Mahasweta Devi's representation of the Tribal breaks away from all sets of traditional concepts and notions of the tribals with her strong solidarity for them and their struggles. Verrier Elwin had aimed to be an authorial voice for the tribals he represented; whom he felt had no one to speak out for them especially in the political arena. Mahasweta too becomes an authorial voice for the people she represents and boldly takes up a political stand to mobilise the tribals in fighting for their rights and uniting themselves in the process. This stand is revealed at almost every turn of event narrated in the novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* (Bangla title is *Chotti Munda ebang Tar Tir,* 1980) translated by Gayatri Spivak in 2001.

According to Bill Ashcroft (2001), fictional narrative is not a rival discourse to history, rather, "it is history... which gives the fictional narrative... something to interpolate" (156). Like Ashcroft, many also posit history and fiction as parallel narratives and not opposing discourses. However Devi's parallel history often opposes the dominant ones. To bring forth a parallel history, Devi often makes it a point to make her subjects remember their oral narratives in their legends, folk-lore and myths. For, the tribals that she so vehemently fights for are usually people who have not yet acquired written scripts and whose knowledge still depend on their oral narratives as memory. She

reads between the lines of their unwritten stories, experiences and songs to document them.

According to cultural anthropologists a myth begins in an oral or pre-literate culture and is taken over by the literate culture which succeeds it. Northrop Frye (1973) also says that in an oral culture "mythology and literature are conterminous" (38). And according to G. N. Devy (2002), "...every written piece of literature contains substantial layers of orality" (xv) and that the Tribal's artistic inclination is based more on "their racial and sensory memory than on the basis of a cultivated imagination" (Devy: xi). According to Minoli Salgado, "A study of Mahasweta's work can lead us to evaluate a significant but often unobserved transition, namely the transition from tale to text to metatext, a transition that is not random but carefully controlled" (150). For the people that Mahasweta speaks for, world historical events have very less meaning on their lives. What is truth is what have been received through their knowledge system or through their oral narratives which have more meaning to their lives. In *Telling History,* added to the introductory part of the novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, which is a written account of Gayatri Spivak's interview with Mahasweta Devi, Mahasweta says that since these people have no script:

> They compose the stream of events into song. By being made into song, into words, they become something... a continuity. Their history is like a big flowing river going somewhere, not without a destination. Not without. These phases come like small streams joining into it, making their history.
> (CMA: xi)

She further says that she has to document all these oral traditions since she fears that they will vanish. Reconstructing a people's history through their memory is where the characteristic of ethnography is discerned, for as noted earlier it is the ethnographic

poetics that pays attention to oral narratives for they give clues to a people's history. The novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* as an ethnographic novel documents the Munda narrative constructed through the songs and stories that the people relay. As the writer says that their history is like a big flowing river where the smaller streams join into this big river, the novel is interspersed with several incidents that all connect to form the Munda history. These incidents all have meaning in the lives of the Mundas for they add to a dominant histiographic narrative of domination and subordination.

The Mundas like other tribal groups were not drawn into the independence struggle and were hardly aware of it. For them it was the Dikus's fight for liberation. They see the movement as "an event in the outside world" (CMA: 68) and

> The August movement did not even touch the life of Chotti's community. It was as if that was the Dikus' struggle for liberation. Dikus never thought of the adivasis as Indian. They did not draw them into the liberation struggle. In war and Independence the life of Chotti and his cohorts remained unchanged. They stand at a distance and watch it all (CMA: 122).

Not only are the Mundas not drawn into the independence struggle, an independent India does not give them liberty from their conditioned lives. The condition of the Chotti villagers is another clear example of a people for whom there is really no post about their colonialism.

Unlike the Bondas of Pratibha Ray who are thrown into such a state of confusion that they could not find a dependable leadership that would give them moral guidance, who unable to recognise nor attack the real enemy resorted to killing one other, the Mundas of Mahasweta depend unitedly on the leadership of Chotti Munda and are well aware of who their enemies are. It is not only the Mundas that look upon Chotti's guidance, it is also the other tribes of the surrounding area and the lower castes as well.

This solidarity becomes their strength and looked upon with suspicion by the ones that dominate them.

The figure of Chotti is a continuity of the legendary heroes Birsa Munda and Dhani Munda, of the Munda community. The novel touches on vital issues of oppression stretching from pre-colonial, colonial times to independence, to Emergency, post-Emergency and the Naxalite movement that has rendered a simple and peace-loving people to rebellion and resistance. The narrative is a narrative of what Sen and Yadav call "Postcoloniality from below" (25), for it is a continual struggle of what Mahasweta herself in her interview calls 'The criminalization of politics'. She also says;

> I have read about the American Indians, when smallpox and other diseases came, they had no resistance against it, and these people had no resistance against the cultural invasion that took place. It is cultural, it is connected with the land, with everything, they want to rob the tribals of everything. (CMA: xii)

Chotti is named after the river Chotti which is incidentally the name of his village as well. His forefather Purti Munda had come to settle in this area and all that he wanted was to lead a typical Mundari life, worshipping god Haram and following their priest, the *Pahan.* Purti was not allowed such freedom, for when the land he had settled was found to be rich in minerals; he was evicted from his home by the Government's Department of Archaeology. Purti Munda's spirit was quite broken, for no matter how remote an area he moves into, like other tribals he is chased out by Whites-Bengalis-Biharis. His peace of mind was further disturbed with so many outside settlers, Hindu enthusiasts of the sect Sadan, Christian missionary, and tea garden recruits and his dream never came thrue. Purti's story is a recurring story of the Mundas and other tribals who are not left in peace

and often chased out of their settlement to accommodate developments that the outsiders bring in but to which they were always excluded from.

Purti's symbolic story has been repeated on and on in Munda oral history. In the course of the narrative of the novel where more recent incidents take place, there is an increasing outside infiltration. A Punjabi came to make bricks; Marwaris came from Calcutta to see if there is coal to benefit from. Others benefitted from the Munda land but the narratives of the villagers is that "the soil has never made Chotti's people or Chhagan's people wealthy...Everythin' is bein' kept aside for Diku" (CMA: 135) and "t' earth kept all this brick, all this coal, all this fruit – for t' Diku" (CMA: 136). It comes to Chotti's mind

> The day is coming. Mundas will not be able to live with their identity. In all national development work they will have to be one with those who, like Chhagan, are the oppressed of the land, and work as field hands, as sweated workers for contractor or trader. Then there'll be a shirt on his body, perhaps shoes on his feet. Then the 'Munda' identity will live only at festivals – in social exchange. (CMA: 139)

Indeed as their lands are taken away from them and they lose their traditional cultivation system or the *Khuntkatti* system and now work as bonded labourers for landowners and moneylenders, their festivals are dear to them for it is there that they can keep their tradition alive.Through an ethnographic account the Munda festive tradition is narrated, which is kept alive each year at the place Chotti. The festival takes place on Bijoya, the High Holiday celebrating the Hindu great goddess's triumph. The adivasis from surrounding twelve villages come for this fair, making huge tigers, elephants, horses of paper stuck on bamboo frames. They carry these animals and dance, including the women. They drink *moua*, the *adivasis*' berry liquor. Police are posted to prevent non-adivasi men from entering the fair and making trouble. The dancing continues from

eleven in the morning to three o'clock, and then begins the much awaited archery competion. The Munda is known for his skill in archery, which is attached to his culture.To hit the final bull's eye the arrow has to be hit through iron rings tied to bamboo poles. The prize consists of contributions. From the *adivasis*, it is a pig. Five rupees each from the Police *Daroga*, Tirathnath Lala, the trader, Harbans Chadha the owner of the brick kiln and Anwar the fruit seller. And though the *adivasis* drink and eat the whole night, to the surprise of the Police *Daroga*, no rioting ever takes place. Such a festival is dear to the Mundas who forget all their troubles and come to participate with full vigour and enthusiasm.

On the other hand according to Dhani Munda such affair is "Gormen babysit's t' Munda tribe" (CMA: 13). For Dhani to see his people deprived of the freedom to administer themselves, their *Khuntkatti* system of cultivation taken away and their festivals controlled by outsiders, he is filled with anger and resentment. He remembers when all the lands had once belonged to the Mundas and Oraons. The young however do not remember such times and dream to win these contests to bring glory to their villages. With Dhani's secret tutoring Chotti becomes adept at archery and wins these contests for many years. At sixty he is made to be the judge and to give chance to others. When the *Daroga* comments that with such an aim, Chotti should take up the rifle, Chotti's reply is "A man-man shoots an arrer...A man-zero shoots a bullet" (CMA: 5). The refrain 'everything is story in the life of Chotti' reflects that whatever information that is gathered by the author is not written history, but documented realism with myths woven around it. That whatever knowledge acquired is passed down through songs and stories.

The character of Dhani is a continuation of Birsa and the uprisings headed by him. Dhani had taken part in the Santal Hul, the Kherwar revolt, the Mulkoi revolt of the

Sardars, and Birsa's revolt in the hope that Mundas would establish villages in the forests and cultivate peacefully along with other *adivasis*. Dhani told Chotti, "T' forest cried. Told him, Birsa, Diku-Master-White man together they've made me unclean, naked, undressed, clean me up" (CMA: 18). Even at eighty plus Dhani is still staunchly against the bonded labour system and the injustices against his people. The revolts that Dhani took part to liberate his people were all defeated and restless men like him are carefully watched by the government before another revolt is organised.

In prison Birsa had murmured to Dhani "I'll come again". Dhani had thus always believed that Birsa would be reborn. In his old age Dhani urgently feels the need to pass on his knowledge to a younger Munda. Firmly believing that Chotti is the incarnation of Birsa he chose Chotti as the young man to carry his and Birsa's torch and so handed over his knowledge to Chotti. He enlightened Chotti's young mind with many things including the disappearance of the Munda *Khuntkatti* system of cultivation. He told Chotti how the Mundas were once free to administer themselves and free to cultivate their own lands. Now all the land is "Diku land – Hindu land" (CMA: 13) and the Mundas would never be happy faced with the money lender's ledgers and bonded labour, which angers Dani who is exasperated that his people fear to fight. Dhani's anger had always been based on 'land as identity'and of a people who have lost hold on what their identity is based on. It is through Dhani's determination to pass down his knowledge to another generation through oral narration that Chotti like other tribal youths receive their knowledge, the history of their people.

> Everything in Chotti Munda's life is a series of stories. Like many other stories of Munda life this narrative is also epic. How the earth was made, how that earth was burnt in the fire of Shengelda, how a man and woman survived, how a new earth was created – these are the perennial stories in

> Munda life. Chotti didn't know that the new epic of Munda life had been created twenty years ago. Dhani tells him. As a result of the relationship that grows between him and Dhani, Chotti also becomes a part of the epic, and his ultimate destiny becomes as enormous and suggestive as that of epic heroes (CMA: 9).

Chotti learned to make poison-berry of the wild creeper while Dhani warned him that a day would come when he would have to kill other humans, and at that time he should raise Dhani's name. Dhani handed his most prized arrow to Chotti a symbol that Chotti must continue the dream to free their people. Passing on his knowledge to a younger one he died in ease in the belief that his cause will continue in another generation. He told Chotti

> No Hul, no Mulkoi struggle, no Ulgulan. Me lord (Birsa) said I'll be born again in t' belly of a Munda mother, Dhani! No trace of that either. T' Mundas now work bonded labour with down-low heads, they die at t' hands of t' moneylender. All's become t' train line, t' police watch, t' muscle force of king-Emperor and Daroga – no end in this – me mind's not in such a world Chotti. (CMA: 16)

Dhani's unfulfilled life is a reflection of the continuing story of the Munda story of domination and subordination for generations by outsiders. Dhani's death with defiance is not unlike Bashai of *Bashai Tudu*, where every Bashai who is re-born in every Santhal rebellion dies with defiance with his fist in the air proclaiming that the spirit of Santhal rebellion will not be broken. According to Mahasweta Devi herself,

> I find that Birsa's uprising did not die with Birsa. And so through the figure of Dhani, I wanted to say that there had to be a magic arrow, not magic in the sense, but an arrow that Dhani wants to hand over. This arrow is a symbol for the person who will carry on the continuity. Chotti is an emblem of that. (CMA: xi)

All Chotti had wanted was to win the games but winning at the fairs began to make him a mythical figure. Stories began to be woven around him much to his dismay. He

insisted that there is no such magic but "That practisin' t' spell" (CMA: 31). Chotti's stories go on and he eventually becomes an undisputed leader of all the tribals and lower castes, and feared by the police for his spelled arrow. Chotti's life story from a naive boy to a skilful archer to a myth and to a legendary leader had never been visioned him, but the inevitable happened, just as the Mundas who are a peaceful people are eventually pushed to resurgence by the injustices metted out on them.

Munda identity to land is witnessed when stony uncultivatable lands are trusted on them. They would nurture the soil with their sweat and great love for the land that would bring back its fertility. When the land becomes fertile and productive the landowners would want to snatch back the land, for it is not acceptable for those who want to keep the old order alive. "In whatever way, it is right that untouchable and adivasi should remain poor" (CMA: 32) is the false ideology of the ones who hold the means of power with the wealth that is gained by the sweat of those that are deprived and subjugated. For those who own lands refuse to work on the soil, while extremely needy workers work on their lands who can be exploited to no limits. Lies and trickery on the part of the exploiters are accepted norms.

Tirathnath had given a piece of stony uncultivable land to Chotti, and he was to take half the produce. This was done by word-of-mouth, and Chotti's honest mind did not think of any kind of deception. When Tirathnath snatched back Chotti's land, Chotti is helpless for he has no written record of his ownership. For the landowner-moneylender, except for his lands other lands should remain unfertile so that there will be more hunger which will mean more bonded labour to exploit. According to Mahasweta,

> The tragedy of India at independence was not introducing thorough land reform. A basically feudal land system is anti-women, anti-poor people, against toiling people. It is the landowners who formed the ministry, and

> become the rulers of the country, why should they do anything else...land distribution system could have been implemented while keeping their own system alive. (CMA: xv)

Even kindly officials can give no help because they are also caught up in similar socio-political systems. When Chotti sought the help of the Tribal officer who is a kindly man, he could not help him nor could he give the tribals any lands. Being the government's plan to introduce cottage industry for the Mundas, he is keener in introducing cottage industry. Unfortunately this decision of the government cannot be put to practice, for the Mundas who are busy with hard work the whole day, that there is hardly any time for them to indulge in arts and craft.

When Chhoti managed to buy a stony non barren land with his hard earned money, for him "Be it barren, be it stony, a bit of land means tying one's drifting existence to an anchor" (CMA: 186). Harbans and Tirathnath who both disagree with each other in many instances are united in feeling that:

> It's not correct that Chotti and company should own even stony land. This might alter the balance of their mental make-up. They may get a sense of property rights in land. This is not desirable. They should be kept like spectres without any recourse, without any materiality, forever dependent. Like those who are kept apart by earth, by water, by air. Unknown to each other, they both look at the matter of Chotti's land in their own self interest. In deep curiosity. Those who have nothing but themselves and their rags – what will they do with this ghostly stony land? (CMA: 187)

Chotti's sharp intelligence and sensitivity, does not escape their thoughs, his reflection is again the Munda narrative, narrated in the oral, "They buy t' whole earth, that's justice. We take two and a half bighas of stone, thas unjust" (CMA: 187).

Living in same social space the roots of contempt, suspicion and hatred have grown firmly between the tribals and the non-tribals, both clinging on to ones own identity.

When Chotti's family began to prosper and bought land, Lala Baijnath the moneylender is not pleased because Bisra, Chotti's mild father, did not borrow money from him. In an altercation between him and Bisra, Lala accused Bisra of being a moneylender for the Mundas, which is taken as a great insult. Bisra retorted by saying, "Munda borrows but doesn' lend. Doesn't suck his brother's blood by moneylendin'. You've abused me" (CMA: 32). When Bisra asked Lala what if he called him a Munda, Lala is enraged and runs to the police accusing Bisra of insulting him. When the police come and beat up Bisra without listening to his side of the story and made the Mundas to pay fine, it is evident on whose side the governmental machienery is.

Hanging himself in front of Lala's house is an act of revenge by Bisra that drives out Lala from the village fearing Chotti's anger. Leaving all his belongings to his son Tirathnath and going on a pilgrimage he drowns in the Ganga River. Mahabir Sahay, the *Daroga* also falls ill and takes leave. Ironically, Bisra's revenge does not liberate his people, for the figure of Tirathnath continued the story of domination and subordination.The incident however provides an addition to the parallel narrative of the subaltern as the *Pahan* believed that there is magical power in Chotti that Baijnath should meet an accident and the policeman should be taken ill.

Tirathnath as money-lender-landowner does not employ as much means of harassments to his bonded labourers compared to other money lenders in other villages in the vicinity, though mentality he remains the same to his scibe,

> Tirathnath is a local resident and this place is in his blood...he has a sense of proprietorship somewhere about Chotti or about all Mundas, or about all local lower-caste folks...it is a proprietorship bound to an ancient relationship (CMA:194).

He feels that as always they should call him their lord and accept that they belong to him. Yet somehow the bond is there. He used to call Chotti's father as 'uncle', and Chhagan's mother when she was alive used to heal everyone with her knowledge of herbs, including Tirath's family members. He just wanted people to have faith and stick on to the old order. Now he feels that Harbans Chadha, the brick kiln owner is stealing them away from him, his property. However unlike other moneylenders he was not in the habit of killing the Mundas and the untouchables. Neither does he want any form of violence.

Japu Singh another moneylender around the area, would burn up fields and homes, in order to keep the rhythm of the five-year plan, for according to him, "the bastards will want to be the Berahmin's equal"(CMA: 195). Burning up the homes of the untouchables he does not prevent the police from coming and told them to do their jobs. He does not bribe the police, but goes around with the police. The oppressed simply does not dare to open their mouths. Then at whim he would donate money for housing and food, not loans. For he is Japu Singh, of Rajput descend - of *rajas*. Thus, moneylenders, local politicians and industrialists carry on the age old imperialism of the Tuglak dynasty of pre- British king-landownership which has similarity with the ancient feudal system of Europe.

It is ironically the whims of these priviledged class that the government listens to and honours. Colonial government had arranged revenue officers to occasionally pitch tent in the villages so that villagers could easily petition whatever complains they have, which would make their lives easier. This was put to an end for it was inconvenient for the landowner-contractor-moneylender. Chotti's befriended white man had told Chotti to go there whenever the officers pitched camp. When drought hits the area severely, the local police refused to forward the news in compliance with the Lala. It was Tirathnath's

opportunity, for he wanted the hungry villagers to borrow from him and to give their thumbprints for bonded labour. With Chotti's leadership in June 1924, the Mundas marched five miles to Tohri where the survey officer had struck camp and there they complained of their hunger. The complain gets through and the Jain Mission and the Baptist Mission were sent to Chotti village to give aids. Even Tirathnath is compelled to give away his bag of maize which is not sellable but later complained to the police that Chotti and his group with bows and arrows had forcefully taken the keys from him and looted his granaries. However the government took matters more seriously and the police *Daroga* was transferred and demoted for not reporting an important incident. Later there was a petition for Lala that since he had saved 117 villages from hunger before the mission arrived, he should be awarded and the government bestowed him the title of Raisaheb. This is the narrative that is recorded in documented government record. The parallel narrative to this documented narrative from the side of the *Pahan* and the villagers is that Chotti is the real hero who had saved them from hunger.

Not only the Mundas but even Dusad-Ganju-Chamar-Dhobi looked upon Chotti for guidance. Chotti's figure thus unites the underpriviledged lot in their stuggles from oppression, though Chotti himself

> Hadn't wanted to be the hero or a legend. He had only wanted the honour for winning at archery. Dhani Munda has turned his life around. But Chotti cannot analyse how it was done. (CMA: 41)

The songs sung of Chotti by his clansmen become a social text and Chotti becomes an identity, a mythical figure and he is identified with any significant happenings in the lives of the Mundas. According to Sen and Yadhav, Chotti as a significant figure is like "a

folkloric chronotope that Baktin identifies with issues of *transformation* and *identity* in which chance and accident have just as important a role as willed action". (32)

Chotti's intelligence could discern that the Mundas could not hold on to their identity for long, and decides that he would teach the art of archery to any young Munda who was ready to learn. This way he passes knowledge and skill to the youngsters around the vicinity, and it was not for long that there emerged skilful archers and Chotti's name is sung and told in stories again.

Silencing of a culture through dominance and imposition is an international narrative and the Munda story is no exeption. Dukhia of Kurmi village went to sell pepper in the market where the Manager of their landlord abused him and touched his basket with his foot. Anger from years of abuse and humiliation turned into fury and Dukhia takes the head of the Manager. Truthful as the tribal is, instead of running away he went to the police and was subsequently hanged for the crime. The author's own thoughts are reflected in the thoughts of Chotti, "Why is he condemned to be hanged after a necessary killing?" (CMA: 70) Even in death the Munda's custom which is to bury their dead is not respected. Dying under police custody, Birsa's and Dukia's bodies were burnt and the Munda culture is silenced through such acts. Chotti's resolve to keep peace for the sake of his people especially for the women and children is often challenged with incidents that are disturbing. Whenever Chotti thinks of Dukhia, Dhani Munda comes to his mind. Bisra killed himself, and

> Dukhia cut the manager down though he knew the result would be death by hanging. Then Chotti understood why Dhani had gone to Jejur. Even with the knowledge that the outcome is death, in order to remain right with oneself, the humans created by Haramdeo, having reached the twentieth century, must sometimes do certain things. Dhani and Dukhia did them. (CMA: 69)

The suffering of the Kurmi villagers increased with the new Manager marking everyone as bonded labourers. He demanded more stuff and more taxes. "Birth-wedding-death in his house or t' countless pujas that these Dikus have, he raises taxes if anythin' goes on in his house." (CMA: 86) To escape their tormentors, the villagers wanted to take refuge in the Mission in Tomaru. The *Pahan* and the elders of their village did not want to leave for they remembered old times when Mundas used to enjoy their *Khuntkatti* farming; they remembered their festivals, most of all, the most enjoyable one – the Hunt festival. If they enter the Mission, they would have to forsake their god Haramdeo, worship Christian god and follow only Christian festivals. So, when the Manager forbid the Kurmi villagers to contest in archery, and then prohibited the most enjoyable festival that is the Hunt festival, because according to him, "the Mundas of Kurmi village are most pig-headed" (CMA: 89). Seeking refuge in the Mission is not an unusual occurance for the tribals during colonial India. The point to be noted is what conditions a people to forsake their village, their god, their traditions and festivals.

> The pahan's entry into the forest is symbolic. With it, at the meeting point of night and dawn, the tale of the Mundas of Kurmi village comes to an end.The story of Joseph Sukha Munda and David Bikhna Munda of Tomaru Mission is different. Some folktales are born. Everything is fiction in Chotti's life (CMA: 96).

Budha pointed out that such act is treachery *Diku*-style. Borrowing and running away and Chotti reflects upon such instances and replied,

> ...t' Munda people don' know thievery, cheatery, don' do that stuff. They go and 'fess up at thana e'en when they kill. If they cheat now, it's learnt from t' *Diku* (CMA: 107).

Budha digs a vital issue of Munda subjugation as he said that the *Dikus* cheat them "'cos we don' know book-learnin'. T' Mission teaches book-learnin' too." (CMA: 107).

Such statement reflects the Mundas of being deprived of education, for Munda children are chased away by caste Hindu children and teachers who would not tolerate their presence in school. The teachers told them that they do not need education but to go and work. A few get their education in the Missions, but find it difficult to get jobs. Through years of subjugation, the Munda cannot define himself and his culture. Mahasweta recounts the government records as such

> Mundas are leaving their homeland. Mostly they're going to the Mission. The responsibility lies with the imbecile zamindar, monstrously greedy moneylender, and other factors. It is said that these people are excitable. But at the Mission their conduct is most peaceful and cooperative. As for agriculture, attractive Christian villages will soon develop and other Mundas will be drawn to them (CMA: 120).

The Munda's strong sense of survival with the help of his knowledge of the land is seen when drought comes to the area in 1950 and even the river Chotti runs dry. Everywhere there is cry for water. The government had crippled the Munda village councils so they had no representatives to speak for them and the *Pahan's* power had been taken away as well. Together the Mundas and the lower castes with Chhagan as their leader began to form up and dig for water at a certain spot which they detected contained water. Tirathnath is deprived of the pleasure of seeing the villagers go thirsty. Even in the famine that followed, Tirathnath does not come forward to help them in their distress but tried to take advantage of the situation for himself. It is Chotti's leadership that unites his people to form solidarity with that of Chhagan's people. United they become a menancing force for Tirathnath, and again

> Everything becomes story in Chotti's life. Story and song. The Mundari language has no writable script. So the Mundas tie everything up in story and song. There's unending suffering and deception in their lives. So they forget it for an instant as they sing Chotti's song (CMA: 134).

Hard times also come in the way of Tirathnath. With democratic India, significantly the tribals and lower castes, especially the tribals are now considered as a vote bank in the area. Every party want to take a hand in the matter. It becomes a hard time for Tirathnath. He is blamed if the Congress looses in the vicinity. Politics begin to take an ugly turn as votes are manipulated and the Youth League candidate wins by a huge margin.

The new MLA declares to Harbans that there will no longer be tender calls for contracts in the British style, and in the Indian way he will be the one to give the contracts. Harbans feels uneasy about it. Though he wants more contracts, he always had high respect for Chotti and his kind. He and his father would never harm labourers but helped them when they were sick and in need. When his profit was good, he gave all of them blankets. Even Tirathnath raised the wages of unbonded labour and gave allowance for food. In their own ways they have more sympathy for the villagers than the political goons that began to create uneasiness in the area.

It became ground reality that after the 1972 elections, all the election campaigning and the promises were a sham. The Mundas witness it all and democracy for them in

> These five reigning years are dedicated to the task of making the rich richer, keeping the lower castes and the adivasis crushed underfoot, and above all, turning those designated hoodlums without portfolios into cannibal gods with the police support. Objective, to renovate India as Baby's playroom. People like Chotti and Chahagan don't get to see this Baby, but they become his toys and receive his kicks. Soon it is clear that the time has come to rewrite old proverbs. It is the naked who must most fear the thief and the armed robber (CMA: 241).

Politics does not liberate the local people in their destitution but became a profitable business for the politicians as shrewd but poorly educated politicians began to

bring in loafers and hoodlums into their party folds for their gain. That is how personalities like Romeo, Pahlwan and Dildar came into the scene as they were given shares in contracts in the area. Romeo is a rapist and murderer by nature. His aim is to teach the harijans and tribals a lesson into submission. Terrorise them by making good use of the government's policy of eliminating the Naxalites, take cuts from their wages and get cheap labour. "Behind Romeo is the State Government, the party organization, Youth league, police, Delhi" (CMA: 257). Thus he and his cohorts run loose in the vicinity, burning, firing and killing the innocent and terrorising the vicinity. Their power still expands as Emergency arrived and Romeo retorted

> Keep the untouchable and the tribal under your shoe. They live well that way. Everyone gets cheap labour. Sowing and reaping go well. And the biggest thing. The glory of the caste remain high. (CMA: 262)

Chhoti's resolve to remain peaceful and to avoid violence for the good of his people especially women and children, begun to be greatly challenged.

> If Gormen want untouchable – tribals to die, kill 'em. Let's die fighting'. If we die fightin', we'll know we did somethin' (CMA: 273).

Incidentally, with the killing of Ananda Mahanto the reporter, officials who were sympathetic towards the tribe are all transferred from the area.

Amlesh Khurana and his appearance on the scene do little help for Chotti and his lot. He is supposed to be a renounced scientist and a favourite of the government. His attitude towards the tribe is"Whatever comradeship he may overtly express, he actually thinks Chotti and others like Chotti are as negligible as insects" (CMA: 327). Though sympathetic, he does not really understand ground realities and tries to help them through totally unrealistic ideals. He looks for a separate village of Mundas, a separate village of

lepers and a separate village of untouchables. His statistics-based paper theories had won the heart of the Government of India, which wanted to promote India into a beautiful garden, whereas the ill educated local M.L.A. understands nothing but his 'cuts', his whore, and his debauchery. Neither do the local administrative authorities have true sympathy, but for fear of reports everyone keeps quiet during Khurana's stay in the vicinity. Mahasweta Devi herself elsewhere in her activistic writings has often pointed out that the International NGOs are ready to pour in money at a particular area that has a project and want to do things at a given time. That in most cases it does not benefit the locals but others benefit from such programs. Spivak believes that this is what is called globalization, to take away the redistributive powers of the state and to give everything to these NGOs, which is undemocratic.

When the Daroga read out the Ordinance of 24th October 1975, that the bonded labour system is at an end and illegal, it should have brought out elation, but Chotti's and Chhagan's lot are thrown into confusion. Chotti thinks that he "knows that nothin'll happ'n wit' this law. So he joked an' said, ye're now kings" while Chhagan muses, "nothing works by the law. For the law is never applied" (CMA: 301). They belived that the law is good, but where does the government live, in Delhi and far away from their remote village and will he see it if adivasis and untouchables die in the forest. Birsa's statue had been erected in the city, but what of his people in the villages. Who is there to be beside or behind them? " Doesn't t' lawer and t' clerk skin alive Munda, Oraon, t' untouchable" (CMA: 302).

True to these misgivings Amlesh Khurana also realised the apathetic attitudes in the meeting he went over the implementation of the law. The district-in-charge thinks of

the adivasis and low castes as pests to be destroyed. “They should be kept bonded for generations...there will always be caste-Hindu rule” (CMA: 309). The Minister retorts,

> The Central Government understands nothing. Just passes Acts...Are untouchables and adivasis a factor? And landlord, moneylender, landed farmer. These are the pillars of the government. Who gives campaign funds? Who controls the vote? (CMA: 310).
>
> We need realism, not idealism. I love the outcastes and the tribals of Bihar more than my life. But I am a realist. It is Emergency time now. The police have a lot of power, the Youth League have guns, the press is muzzled. Trying to implement the law at this time, shall I throw the untouchables and adivasis of my Bihar into the tiger’s jaw? How can that be (CMA: 311).

Chotti’s wise but pathetic conclusion to his group is that they should continue to give bonded labour for their people need loans now and then to fill their bellies and it’s safer not to anger the bosses and the goons. For “boss-polis-party are one hat” (CMA: 318).

A significant event that happened in the life of Chotti was his encounter with a Naxalite member who was fleeing from the Police but was later brutally killed by the police. The police version is that the young man was carrying bombs and is highly dangerous and was killed after a hard chase. Chotti and his people witnessed the lies but were helpless to speak out. Chotti himself could not comprehend “Why is a Diku getting chased by police to do tribal good...that Diku comes to do good for tribal and runs away from the polis chase”(CMA: 228). It pierced Chotti’s heart leading him to befriend the Naxalites.

This final connection between the Naxalites and the tribals and untouchables become inevitable. While Chotti’s group are aware of their rights but are helpless, Swarup Prasad and his group affirm their solidarity for Chotti and his people. The incident that happened on pay day and the tension after, gave evidence of that. Swarup’s

corpse with black holes and his genitals like mincemeat bear evidence of police atrocity and a loud warning as to what they would do to anyone that help the Naxalites.

Shankar the IAD man is all out to eliminate the Naxal group, and even planned a struggle between the Youth Leaguers and Chotti and Chhagan's group to see if Swarup's men would come forward to help the tribals and the untouchables. Shankar's motive does not let him to be bothered by inevitable killings of innocent women and children. Thus tension proceeds in the area. The tribals and untouchable are now aware of the bonded labour act and the minimum wages act and the next pay day they are ready for a shuffle. Even the mild Chotti comes out with his bow and arrows. The Youth Leaguers are called by Tirathnath and they come with guns. They shot Dukhia. Chotti's accurate aim shot the shoulders of Romeo, Dildar and Pahlwan.

The government's discriminating attitude is reflected through what happened after such incidents. Chotti's remark to the S.D.O. was "Ye lord! Ye saw t' harm done by arrers but not t' harm of guns?" (CMA: 332) To the S.D.O.'s question, "Were the arrows poisoned?" Chotti's reply was, "It's possible. Don't guns have gunpowder?" (CMA: 333)

One Youth Leaguer is shot dead by an arrow. Dildar also dies of the poisoned arrow and his family and the dead Youth Leaguer's family received a hundred thousand rupees and a petrol pump, while no such sympathy is showed to the tribals nor their predicaments. The families of Dukhia and Jugal who had been shot by guns received fifty rupees as aid from Amlesh and he earned the reputation for 'magnanimity'. Romeo and Pahlwan both lost their right arms and are greatly angered. "Now Chotti village is an open battlefield" (CMA: 335).

Were proper actions made on the part of the government to such incidents the area could have retained its peacefulness, but the report that was recorded was that the incident bears the mark of

> ....action-operations of organizations such as Adivasi Forest Association, Birsa Group, Adivasi Service Committee and the like. The second and the third have been destroyed almost to the root. It's the organization of the first that is strong, the group is nourished by the support of the adivasis and Swarup Prasad is still active...(CMA: 337).

Thus, a peaceful people are represented as violent in the government record, and with the death of Swarup, Chotti's mistrust of the government and its administration became doubled. In his mind he said, "This time t' terror will be greater" (CMA: 341).

In the next incident of violence, Romeo is all out to take revenge. In this incident the case that is put up blames the Youth League, but the case somehow never reached the court. Since his 'mind is a dense forest' Romeo believes that it is Shankar who had given Chotti the courage to shoot him, "...if he is IAD, I too am Youth League. Who can restrain the forward march of Youth League in India" (CMA: 344). Shankar is riddled with bullets and the police and special police now chase the Youth Leaguers, and to the surprise of Romeo and Pahlwan they are caught by the police and tortured the IAD way. Chotti and his group 'ululates with glee'. Tension is now between Youth League, Congress, police and IAD.

When in January 1977, the Emergency ended, the *adivasis* of Swarup's group came out of Kurmi forests and dispersed in different villages. In the ensuing election, the congress lost the election and the Janata Party came to power. Chotti's and Chhagan's group are of mixed feelings while Romeo and Pahlwan came out of jail by mid 1978. They now join the Janata Party and call the Youth League an 'asshole organization' that

were unable to save them from the IAD. They bribe Harbans Chadha's contract business with disproportionate bribes. This was a blow for Chottti, it was "Diku diku wear the same hat" (CMA: 347) and "Ancient apprehensions thicken in the tribal and outcaste alike" (CMA: 349).

Chotti and Chhagan understand that the member elected in their area is the brother of a rich contractor and it is with money that he had won the election. They understand that the contractors are going to be worse than the police troubles. They understand that the big contractors would take their people to the coal mines and their people would be bonded labourers there. From their talks with Tirathnath and then the S.D.O., they realise that bonded labour would not cease and that even though the Emergency was no more, the Youth Leaguers turned Janata Youth boys would still come to disturb their peace and hounding Swarup's group would still go on. The S.D.O. who is hands in glove with Romeo and Pahlwan, and since they bought Chadha's brick kiln, they declared that all the labourers belong to them much to the anger of the labourers who felt that they were not bonded to work there. The final death of Romeo and Pahlwan with arrows on their backs made the police to believe that they were killed by the *adivasis* and it was the S.D.O.'s firm resolve that "Such a great crime can't be tolerated" (CMA: 357).

> If Romeo and Pahlwan had killed every adivasi in the area, no one would have found it 'unexpected'. There are adivasis, there are subcastes, the Romeos kill them, it happenes like this. But if one or a few adivasis kill the Romeos it is unexpected event. The Romeos kill, they're not killed. This is the rule. Under all regimes. (CMA: 358)

Even though the police combed all the surrounding villages and beat up the villagers, no one spoke out. The S.D.O. ordered that everyone should come to the next fair at Chotti otherwise all their children should be caught and taken to the thana. He made up his mind

that whoever hit the bull's eye should be caught as the killer. Chotti also gave words to his people that everyone even the children and the old should come to the fair but no one should hit the target and Chhagan should beat the drum.

So the last day of Goddess Feast – Bijoy Dashami 1978, everyone came, with their bows and arrows. Two hundred and fifty armed police came, S.D.O., Daroga, Tirathnath, Harbans all came to the fair. In the archery contest no one came forth to contest, much to the anger of the S.D.O. Finally, Chotti rose from the judge's seat and tells the S.D.O.,

> Why will ye beat up all t' men to catch their killers, and grab all t' mites from their mother's breasts and fill t' thana...Me father died by reason of that Lala's dad. I ne'er did a betrayal, and still he sent me son to je-hell, and I saved him from t' wheels of a movin' train! Munda-Oraon-Dushad-Dhobi have never broken trust! And what did we get for that Lord? What did you give us? You'll raise terror? They went to take t' honour of our daughters, all t' daughters of t' families of t' pahan, his wife, of Motia, of t' railway porter, of Dukhia, Jugal, Chhagan – they died, and then there were no polis lord? Did you not work this way...I killed 'em...
>
> I've killed, yes, I am that Chotti Munda...
>
> Dhani Munda! I'm raisin' yer name an' shootin' yer arrer today. To stay true, meself to meself (CMA: 362,363).

Even at seventy years odd raising Dhani's name he hits the bull's eye with accurate aim, Chotti is now ready to lead his people at any level.

> Then he waits, unarmed. As he waits he mingles with all time and becomes river, folklore, eternal. What only the human can be. Brings all adivasi struggle into the present, today into the united struggle of the adivasi and the outcaste (CMA: 363).

All of Chotti's resolve to remain passive and peaceful for the good of his people, of innocent women and children comes to an end. To be true to his people he has to do something and show who a Munda is. Like the ever flowing river of Munda history

colonial rule, independence and democracy does not liberate them. Chotti becomes like Birsa, Dhani, an eternal Munda story that paches up to become a social text, an epic.

Verrier Elwin in *Phulmat of the Hillls* had represented the tribal world as a world inflicted by poverty, diseases, sickness and magic. But within this world are beauty, grace and love and nothing could stop the dancing and singing. Gopinath Mohanty's tribal world in *Paraja* is a primitive romantic site which slowly disintegrates with outside forces infiltrating and destroying the simple minds of the tribals and the idealised world.

Both Pratibha Ray's and Mahasweta Devi's tribal world is a world of turbulence; where past idealised world is history and remembered through social memory. The represented tribal worlds from the point of keen ethnographers predict inevitable turbulent futures. The habitants of these tribal worlds are turning into resisting forces for the confusions they are thrown into. Both these writers try to discern the present socio-political situation by connecting their subjects' past through their oral narratives and to understand their resistence to the forces that have disturbed their way of life. The tribals' unwritten history often differs from the recorded history. These ethnographic novels that delve deep into the tribals' narratives prove that their stories do have meaning and are a collective wisdom and a repository of social cultural behaviour for the people that are encountered in the novels. The subaltern has been made to speak out through these novels as they are documents of his own narratives, thus rendering the ethnographic novel as a contesting ground to Tribal history that is filling in the gaps of silenced people and individuals that create unwritten history.

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Chapter 5
Conclusion

As modern ethnography emerged under the umbrella of anthropology in the 19th century it had the saction of scientific validity in representing peoples and cultures. Emerging as a serious discipline during colonialism, ethnography was a useful tool for the colonisers to classify societies and representing them under colonial domination. Today as questions arise as to the methods used in representing societies and constructing their identities without their say in the matter, colonial ethnography viewed with suspicion has come to be questioned and criticised and regarded by many as negative and destructive to the given societies. As post-colonial discourses open up a space for these societies to question constructed identities of them, colonial ethnography has come to be contested even in the realm of literature. With the changing concept of writing, narrative and text the boundary between literary and non-literary writings have begun to get blurred. With recent literary theories and literature beginning to perceive far broader perceptions in the very term representation, the boundary between history, ethnography and literature has begun to lose their rigidity even as interdisciplinary studies are underway.

Recent discourses now begin to point out that ethnography and history which are supposedly based on facts are fictions in that though based on facts they fictionalise the narrative. As Marxism and Cultural Studies begin to point out why one set of individual is more priviledged than another, the question posed is who has the authority to represent another, for what reason and for whom. Even as the scientific validity of ethnography is

being contested, ethnography in being sensitive to recent literary theories and with changes in world order, it has begun to change its attitudes in representing others and experimenting different genres for representing subjects of ethnography. In being sensitive to recent literary theories ethnography is moving closer towards arts especially literature. Ethnography in recent years is being appropriated to different disciplines and is now used as a code-word for any qualitative inquiry. However, the true sense of ethnography as written communication in representing a people is what remains in the thesis, even as methods of representing peoples have become more fluid in a globalising world of media orientation.

The novel, the latest born of the established literary genres remains a popular mode of representing subjects of ethnography, even as recent critics begin to foreground the interdisciplinary nature of the novel. As ethnography moves closer towards arts and literature it is especially moving closer towards the prose fiction, for in both ethnography and the prose fiction is the production and interpretation of narrative. As a mode of representing ethnographic subjects of studies the ethnographic novel has proved to be a useful and interesting genre of writing for it merges the scientific and the sensitive. The novel form of writing will not cease to be an art form in its representation of characters and the actions they make. The ethnographic techniques applied to the novel form involve scientific inquiry and fieldwork activities thus rendering such novel form of writing as a documented realism, and often perceived as a *non- fiction*. On the other hand, it is *fiction* in that it fictionalises its characters that have been drawn from real life experiences. It locates an alternative way of life that one may have known about, but have no indepth knowledge of. It narrates an alternate every day life which is not our own, about elemental life and not some imaginary life somewhere.

As the ethnographic novel is a study of Man, culture and society, one cannot ignore the need to contextualise the text to its given circumstances where the author cannot remain a passive onlooker or outsider to culture changes that take place with time. The author often highlights points through the voices of his characters and actions they make. The interdisciplinary method of the ethnographic novel production and consumption clearly indicate the involvement of the author, the text, the reader and its contextual relevance.

As today critics such as Stuart Hall, Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak begin to point out that identities are found to be constructed by history and history along with its dominant representations are now grounds for debates. History conceived as writing and as narrative has thus begun to break the boundary between fact and fiction. This is found to be true in the study and representation of the Tribal in the context of India. It is through history, ethnography and ancient Indian texts that served as history, which had constructed the Tribal's identity with negative connotations. Even as Subaltern historians such as Ranajit Guha begin to point this out, it is through the medium of the ethnographic novel that subverted history of the ahistorical are projected.

The Tribal in the Indian context has become an ideological concept as there had not been critical inquiries to representations made of him by Colonial records that had termed him as 'tribe' with negative connotations. His identity that has been constructed has been the outcome of pre-colonial, colonial, neo-colonial and nationalists' texts written by outside forces to the Tribal's own. This image was repeatedly essentialised without his say in the matter and he had been repeatedly silenced. His being viewed as Other in the Indian context and the perpetual stereotyping of his image further

disintegrates his difference in a multi-cultural context where a healthy social stratification is a much needed condition. For,

> The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the *representation* of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations (Bhabha: 107).

Even as Spivak places the tribals of India in the ambit of a 'fourth world' along with other indigeneous peoples of the world in a global context; at home he is not given the status of being the aboriginal of the country though he is repeatedly refered to by writers as the aboriginal of the country. Years of his displacement and disintegration materially, mentally and geographically is the price played for dream developments for national interests as a whole. His culture is often denigrated and silenced due to his inability to speak out because of poverty and marginalisation, and wherein his oral culture cannot stand up against stronger and more dominant cultures at hand.

The thesis refutes the view of literary thinkers who believe that Subaltern Studies should be confined to the other disciplines and not in literature which should remain pleasure giving and a relaxation; but can one forever ignore voices inscribed within oral and written texts. JanMohamed and Llyod in their essay, "Towards a Theory of Minority Discourse" (1990) have pointed out the damage inflicted on minority communities by hegemonic discourses,

> The pathos of hegemony is frequently marked by its interested celebration of differences, but only of differences in the aestheticised form of recreation. Detached from the site of their production, minority cultures become palatable... Cultural practices are an intrinsic element of the economic and political struggles of Third World and minority peoples... For many minorities, culture is not a mere superstructure; all too often, in an ironic twist of a Sarrean phenomenology, the physical survival of

> minority groups depends on the recognition of its culture as viable.
> (JanMohamed and Lloyd: 5-6)

Thus, the Tribal's right to his own self-representation versus the representation of dominant structures is the point made here. The ethnographic novel representing the Tribal is produced through the Tribal's own narrations and makes attempts to expose the Tribal's self-identity through his culture and his own documented history. However this subjective approach does not necessarily prelude the objective approach. For in practice, a minority group's identity always depends both on its own self-definition and the recognition of this definition by another dominant group. Thus, the Tribal needs the co-operation of others for him to speak out in defining his own self-identity.

The regional writer has proved to give more authentic representations of the Tribal due to his proximity to the Tribal, aesthetically, geographically and in his knowledge of the Tribal's own language, and it is through the translation of regional texts into English that these texts can be brought forth for discourses into the ambit of Indian English literature. Translations made of such texts into English have indeed changed the face of Indian English literature for since its beginnings the Indian English literature had been dominated by the educated elite who have limited knowledge and understanding of ground realities of the Tribal's domain.

The translator in his choice of text for translation makes his own representation. Elwin may have written in English, which is his mother tongue, but his works are successful in translating the detached scientific object of study into the subjective. Elwin himself as a part of colonial India aimed to be an authorial voice for the tribals of India. He has been instrumental in bringing in the ethnographic novel form of writing into the Indian soil while the tribals as his subject play important roles. A romantic at heart,

Phulmat of the Hills in representing the Tribal is contained with a romantic plot as background. The novel perceives the inevitable contact of the Tribal with outside forces that are going enter his domain and confuse the innocent Tribal's philosophy of life.

Paraja, brings out the Tribal in his own setting where 'land as identity' is a marked psyche. Gopinath Mohanty's representation reveals an idyllic space that is slowly crumbling. In projecting the Tribal protagonist and his struggles to Man's universal struggle for existence, he brings out the Tribal from preconcept notions of him as a 'beast' or a 'ghost' to a human being who has his own struggles just as universal Man does. Bikram Das in translating the novel has opened out the text for wider readership.

In *The Primal Land* the translator Bikram Das shares the same concern with the writer Pratibha Ray whose representation show concern for a culture that is under threat of extinction. He points this out while writing the translator's forward, that this novel would well serve as an obituary for the Bondo tribes of Orissa. Along with the writers of these novels, Bikram Das shares concerns but like the authors he is as helpless to political systems that characters, neither writers nor translators have the power to change. All that can be done for the peoples represented is to document and transform into texts of a way of life that would sooner or later disappear.

Mahasweta Devi's representation of the Tribal is outright solidarity towards her subjects. As the characters that inhabit the novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* turn from a peaceful lot to a resisting force, the author seem to move with her characters. With Gayatri Spivak as the translator to this novel, the ownership of the text has also become a domain for literary discourses. For,

> While Spivak, the translator, is busy advocating the need to address cultural difference and disjunction in Mahasweta's texts, the author herself is keen to focus on the generalized tribal experience... and posit the need for the tribal

> people's insertion into the Indian mainstream – a need, of course, which undermines Spivak's claim that Mahasweta's work punctures nationalist discourse... the author makes claims to accessing interior authenticity and the translator lays claim to post-publication authority (Salgado: 153).

Literary representations made through the ethnographic novels may as well benefit the social and political scientists for such novels are the outcome of indepth knowledge of a people, their culture and their political socio-economic situations. They may even pose answers as to why tribal areas are prone to violence and resistance in our present times and especially so in a shift to ecocentric awareness where the Tribal's way of life and indigenous knowledge is under a process of re-thinking to save planet Earth. Interdisciplinary readings can benefit all who are concerned with Man, society and culture, for,

> Historians concerned with recuperating the peasant experience in history have often turned for help to the resources of other disciplines, such as anthropology, demography, sociology and human geography. (Singh: 131)

The ethnographic poetics pays attention to the oral narratives of a people and it is through these social texts that the history of a people are inscribed and are clues to why people behave in certain ways. The textualization of memory becomes an important device in the ethnographic novel. Misgivings that translation of oral narratives into written document render loss of its authenticity may be plausible in certain contexts but in the ethnographic novel it provides a background to the people represented, especially so when a people's history does not find space in dominant history. The need to document these oral traditions is foregrounded as cultures mingle and go through change and before oral traditions are erased from memory.

As identities are found to be constructed by history, and history re-examined as fiction, the Tribal's own self representation can find space in the ethnographic novel, to

contest history, literary texts and colonial ethnography that had so far constructed his identity. The ethnographic technique of the novel writing while paying attention to the oral narratives of a people brings out subverted and parallel historical narratives of the ahistorical subject. The oral narrative of a culture as social text is where memory is retained through collective consciousness, for history is created out of collective consciousness. In the ethnographic novels *Phulmat of the Hills*, *Paraja*, *The Primal Land, Chotti Munda and His Arrow,* the oral narratives as social text and memory of a people give answers to many patterns of behaviours of the people represented and the sub-text gets transformed into the meta-narrative in the ethnographic novel. When the Tribal finds no space in dominant history, the ethnographic novel that represents him fills in these gaps. For indeed Indian history too began with literary texts and documented mythologies of dominant cultures of the time.

Thus, the thesis concludes that as ethnography moves closer towards arts and especially literature with which it had always had close affinity with, literature like other contemporary disciplines should not lag behind in appropriating ethnography to its discipline. The thesis also concludes that the ethnographic novel is a contesting ground to the Tribal's history as it challenges dominant history which began with literary texts. It thus opens a space for theoretical discussions across interdisciplines and also opens space for further research.

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