Journal of the Department of English
Vidyasagar University
Vol. 9, 2011-2012

‘Resistant Subalternity’: Re-reading Indigenous Writings of Australia and India

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I

The aim of this paper is to explore a novel understanding of resilience, one that develops a new approach to ecological views as well. Within the domain of an ecological paradigm, resilience has been described as health in spite of adversity (Masten, 2001). Ecological interpretations of resilience to a large extent are based on cultural imperialism. It develops into a social construction in course of time and finds myriad expressions across global cultures and variegated social and political moorings (Boyden, 2001). The problems of addressing the issue of resilience have been taken up by many leading researchers (Gilgun, 1996a; Glantz & Sloboda, 1999; Kirby & Fraser, 1997; Masten, 2001). Still, there have been many hassles in developing acceptable definitions of resilience that will be able to record the experiences of the marginalized groups (Gilgun, 1999). The literature on resilience has considered a vast range of ecological factors that correlate with the smooth functioning in endangered marginalized communities. It gives us relevant information about the resilient marginalized population that displays individual, social and environmental features. The researchers have often related such features with resilience. The advocates of an ecological model of resilience rely more on ethnocentrism than cross-cultural reading that challenges the monopoly of Western standards.

The ecological model of resilience puts a sharper focus on resilience-enhancing variables and processes in developmental studies. It draws attention to the children and youth of the marginalized groups who, faced with events of risk, show traits related to normative definitions of health. Such individuals of marginalized communities are defined as resilient. Ann Masten (2001) defined resilience as a "class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development" (p. 228). Jane Gilgun (1999) has maintained that the resilience construct indicates a set of behaviours and internalized competencies to face risk at different levels.

One school of studies on resilience stresses on the life course development and modifications in the level of functioning through the study of patterns of adaptation and adapting with various stressful incidents such as dislocations or a shift in economic status.

Another set of studies of resilience research is confined solely to the recovery after instances of mental and spiritual shock, particularly human in intention (Beardslee, 1989; Garmezy, 1991). This study focuses on developmental avenues in the post-trauma phase and predisposing behaviours that absorb the harmful impact of the trauma.

The individual or environment is able to absorb the risk with the help of in-built mechanisms of belief system, a positive disposition toward life, an inspiriing personality and an internal site of control. The children and youth of the Aboriginal communities have displayed great resilience under adverse situations. Challenge factors also immune the individual or community against future stress during crises (Cairns & Cairns, 1994; Chong, 2000; Rutter, 1987).

The best of resilient researchers have tried to explain various sociopolitical factors that pose a challenge to the psychopathologizing discourse of cooperating with resilient individuals. Many studies in the area have carefully examined the relationship between exposure to danger and mental health. The researchers have also felt that the psychopathology of marginalized populations has been blown out of proportions due to the presence of cultural and racial insensitivity.

In the ultimate evaluation the idea of resilience is found to be context – specific as normative definitions of mental health and well-being are context-specific. As Howard Kaplan (1999) observed,

A major limitation of the concept of resilience is that it is tied to the normative judgements relating to particular outcomes. If the outcomes were not desirable, then the ability to reach the outcomes in the face of putative risk factors would not be considered resilience. Yet it is possible that the socially defined desirable outcome may be subjectively defined as undesirable, while the socially defined undesirable outcome maybe subjectively defined as desirable. From the subjectively point of view, the individual may be manifesting resilience, while from the social point of view the individual may be manifesting vulnerability. (31-32)

II

In contemporary Australian Aboriginal writing there are many context-specific literary expressions of the idea of resilience. I would like to refer to the poems of a contemporary writer, Romaine Moreton (b. 1969) who is also a successful film-maker and performance poet from the Gonepul people of Stradbroke Island and the Bundjalung people of northern New South Wales. In her Working Note on the internet one finds a clear expression of the principle of resilience:

I believe it is important as an Indigenous poet that I create works that are not only accessible in terms of language and imagery to Indigenous audiences, but also pertinent. As a result, the language and themes I do choose to work with have been considered rather confronting and challenging, which I can understand. However, the things I have to say and how I say them are a direct response to the environment in which I have grown up and continue to live in. To create works that do not deal with the morbid and mortal affects of racism for one … common themes of the struggle to survive, which is a true celebration of humanity, can be found in my work, nevertheless it shall (hopefully) remain ambitions and provocative to some readers, as can be said of Indigenous experiences … while Indigenous audiences are my primary audience, I do welcome the opportunity to share the experiences of all cultures and lifestyles through my work and life, and embrace our differences as much as our similarities.[1]

This perception belies the innate resilient mindset of the writers. She does not indulge in counter-violence in her poetry as a befitting reply to the violence practised by the white people. Rather she puts up a truly non-violent face of resistance to highlight the great level of endurance of the Aboriginal people of Australia.

Moreton's poem "Genocide is Never Justified" (1995) is an authentic expression of this approach to life. I quote a few lines from this poem to illustrate my argument:

And the past was open to gross misinterpretation.

……

This land, *terra nullius* was never barren and

Unoccupied!

This land was never void of human life!

Instead

Thriving with the knowledge of tens of thousands of years.

Everywhere I look!

Ghosts!

Vacant, colourless faces stare back

Sans culture

Sans the belief of deserving of equality,

Who was here first is not the question

anymore

It is what you have done since you arrived,

The actions you refuse to admit to,

The genocide you say you never committed!

Then why are my people so few

When they were once so many?

Why is the skin so fair when once as black as the land?

Colonised rape.

Why are you so rich, by secular standards

And we now so poor, by secular standards

The remnants of a culture though,

still

Rich

In

Spirit

and

Soul (157-158)

Another poem, "I Shall Surprise You By My Will" by Romaine Moreton, is an honest expression of the Aboriginal virtue of resilience particularly in relation to the environmental concerns and the concomitant exploration of the issue of identity.

I Shall Surprise You By My Will

I will make oppression work for me

With a turn and with a twist

Be camouflaged within stated ignorance

Then rise

I surprise you by my will

I will make oppression work for me

With a turn and with a twist

I shall sit cross-legged like a trap door

Then rise

I surprise you by my will

I will let you pass me over

Believe me stupid and ill informed

Then once you believe me gone or controlled

Will rise

And surprise you by my will

I shall spring upon you words familiar

Then watch you regather as they drop about

Like precious tears thick with fear

Hear you scream and shout

Then I shall watch convictions break away

And crumple like paper bags

And then as beauty I shall rice

And surprise you by my will

It is only when you believe me gone

Shall I rise

From this place where I

Wait

Cross-legged

Wait

To surprise you by my will

……

For the mountain we crossed

They were easy

And the rivers we swam

They easier still

And even then

As I attempted to outrun inhumanity

I surprise you by my will

I have witnessed the falling of many

Heard them cry and hear them still

Even with grief inside me growing

I command my spirit to rice
And surprise you by my will
And for all people
We are here and we are many
And we shall surprise you by our will
We will rise from this place where you expect
To keep us down
And we shall surprise you by our will
For the bullets we dodged
They were difficult
And this ideological warfare
More difficult still
But even now
As we challenge humanity in
We shall rise
And surprise you by our will (164-166)

These lines are wonderfully evocative of the Aboriginal spirit of resilience. The will power of a lone, suffering individual as a representative of an entire race soon merges with the collective voice of resistance. But interestingly, the discourse of violence is not answered by a discourse of counter-violence. Rather the vast, prolonged exposure to immeasurable suffering hardens the soul, stiffens the mind to launch a comprehensive attack on a vicious system determined by hegemonic power. A major historic wrong doing is negotiated by a spirited principle of upholding justice without treading the devil's path, with rancour in mind. This is a unique feature of the Aboriginal belief system that upholds the power of tribal imagination to construct a truly egalitarian and non-competitive notion of space without violence. This inimitable virtue of Aboriginal people can be ascribed to their resilient life style and social customs that find an eloquent expression in David Unaipon's prose work *Aborigines, Their Traditions and Customs: Where Did They Come From?* (1924):

> […..] Since coming to Australia thousands of years ago, there has been probably little or no change in the habits and the customs of my people. They have kept the balance of Nature; … Our tribal laws and customs are fixed and unchangeable. Generation after generation has gone through the same rigid tribal training … Narroondarie was our great traditional leader. The laws of Narroondarie are taught to the children in their infancy … The first test is to overcome appetite, by doing a two-day walk or hunt without food, and then to be brought suddenly before a fire, on which is cooking some choice Kangaroo steak or other native delicacy. The next test is to overcome pain. The young boys and girls submit to having their noses pierced, their bodies marked, and to lying down upon hot embers, thinly covered with boughs. The third test is to overcome fear. The young people are told fearful and hear-raising stories about ghosts and The Muldarpi (Evil Spirit or devil-devil). After all this, they are put to sleep in a lonely place or near the burial places of the tribe. During the night the elders, made hideous with white clay and bark head-dresses, appear, making weird noises. Those who show no signs of having had a disturbed night are then admitted as fully initiated members of the tribe. (19-20)

Unaipon provides a detailed account of Aboriginal knowledge system, scientific learning, strict tribal code of laws and a rich heritage of myths and legends. Such accounts inform us about the real source of resilience in Aboriginal psyche – the processes to overcome appetite, fear and pain. In an emphatic assertion of Aboriginal innocence, Unaipon puts the blame squarely on the corrupting influence of white civilization:

> It is only when the Aborigines come in contact with white civilization that they leave their tribal laws, and take nothing in place of these old and well established customs. It is then that disease and deterioration set in. (21)

The contact with white civilization is interpreted as the beginning of degeneration. It pollutes the sacred space, the sacrosanct value system and the age old cultural practices of the indigenous people. Reading of space (spiritual, physical and cultural) in terms of socio-psychic relations may well be applied to the Aboriginal concept of space and social spatiality ancestral domains are defined as areas belonging to indigenous cultural communities. The indigenous peoples and their

communities occupied these ancestral spaces since time immemorial. Unlike the white colonial settlers, they have been instrumental in maintaining ecological balance and restoring denuded areas.

Throughout the nineteenth century many Aborigines had been systematically disenfranchised from their traditional lands and cultural practices. Many Aboriginal writings (including petitions and chronicles) record this saga of interminable grief and suffering due to territorial and cultural dislocations.

With regard to the resilient mindset of the Aboriginals in the face of severe hostilities, Prof. C. D. Narasimhaiah has made the following observation in his book "Essays in Commonwealth Literature" (2005):

> It has been observed earlier in this essay that in Australia the Stone Age man and his civilized descendant from Europe have met. Perhaps not 'met', for the white man has committed a 'bloodless murder' of the aborigine but here is more evidence of real attrition of the heart for what has happened to the primitive man elsewhere. For one thing the land has so many aborigines surviving to this day … The poets and painters of Australia have helped to sensitize the rest of the society to the aborigine's plight and rouse its conscience, not always by idealizing him but by treating him generously and imaginatively. Would it be mean to surmise that the white man has only reciprocated the aborigine's decency? For unlike the Red Indian the aborigine didn't put up a fight against the colonist; he just with drew into the outbacks there to wander free as the wind till he would perish in his pride. But what cares he as long as he can recall his 'dreamtime' and be at peace with himself and the rest of the universe? (173-174)

In the same essay C. D. Narasimhaiah has also made a comparison between an Australian Aborigine and Shakespeare's Caliban. While the former is not vindictive and violent the latter was full of angry protest and revenge.

As early as 1836 when the colony of South Australia was founded the Governor's Proclamation promised full protection to the indigenous people. Accordingly reserves have been established and mission stations have been founded. But it seems the indigenous people suffered disease and death due to their contact with civilization. What is even more deplorable, they have suffered loss of the organic community in which everyone was tied to every other by permanent bonds.

Their wonderful organization suffered disintegration and the Aborigines have lost their religion and culture. Judith Wright indirectly snubs the white man for the agonizing consequences and laments in her poem, 'Bora Ring", taken from the anthology *Collected Poems* (1994):

The song is gone; the dance

Is secret with dancer in the earth

The ritual useless and the tribal story

Lost in an alien tale. (121)

I would also like to refer to the moving speech of trade unionist and Aboriginal activists William Ferguson (1802-1950) and John Patten (1905-1957) that ruthlessly exposed the hypocrisy of white Australians and brilliantly manifested the resilient mindset of the Aborigines:

Aborigines Claim Citizen Rights!

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS

The 26th of January, 1938, is not a day of rejoicing for Australia's Aborigines; it is a day of mourning. This festival of 150 years' so-called 'progress' in Australia commemorates also 150 years of misery and degradation imposed upon the original native inhabitants by the white invaders of this country. We, representing the aborigines, now ask you, the readers of this appeal, to pause in the midst of your sesqui-centenary rejoicings and ask yourself honestly whether your 'conscience' is clear in regard to the treatment of the Australian blacks by the Australian whites during the period of 150 years' history which you celebrate?

THE OLD AUSTRALIANS

You are the New Australians, but we are the Old Australians. We have in our arteries the blood of the Original Australians, who have lived in this land for many thousands of years. You came here only recently, and you took our land away from us by force. You have almost exterminated our people, but there are enough of us remaining to expose the humbug of your claim, as white Australians, to be a civilized, progressive, kindly and humane nation. By your cruelty and callousness towards the Aborigines you stand condemned in the eyes of the civilized world.

PLAIN SPEAKING

These are hard words, but we ask you to face the truth of our accusation. If you would openly admit that the purpose of your Aborigines Legislation has been, and now is, to exterminate the Aborigines completely so that not a trace of them or of their descendants exterminate the Aborigines completely so that not a trace of them or of their descendants remains, we could describe you as brutal, but honest. But you dare not admit openly that your hope and wish is for our death! You hypocritically claim that you are trying to 'protect' us; but your modern policy of 'protection' (so-called) is killing off just as surely as the pioneer policy of giving us poisoned damper and shooting us down like dingoes!

We ask you now, reader, to put your mind, as a citizen of the Australian Commonwealth, to the facts presented in these pages. We ask you to study the problem, in the way that we present the case, from the Aborigines' point of view. We do not ask for your charity; we do not ask you to study us as scientific freaks. Above all, we do not ask for your 'protection'. No, thanks! We have had 150 years of that! We ask only for justice, decency and fair play. Is this too much to ask? Surely your minds and hearts are not so callous that you will refuse to reconsider your policy of degrading and humiliating and exterminating Old Australia's Aborigines? […] (31-32)

III

Resilience is defined as a dynamic process in which individuals exhibit positive behavioural adaptation when they encounter significant adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress. The resilient responses of the Australian Aborigines to the white domination find great resonance in Indian tribal movements as well. I would like to refer to the historic Munda[2] rebellion under the leadership of Birsa[3] Munda during the last few years of the nineteenth century. The rebellion was chiefly caused by the British colonial administration's interference in the Indian tribal life and society. It resulted in a breakdown of the indigenous agricultural system. The colonizers also imposed Christianity on tribal people with great zeal. The nature and extent of exploitation of the poor tribal people was quite appalling. In this context, it is quite amazing to notice the mostly non-violent form of tribal resistance against the organized force of the British rulers and the local zamindars. This was again possible due to the able leadership of Birsa Munda,

regarded as the son of God (almost like Narroondarie, the great Aboriginal leader and law-giver). Birsa was converted to Christianity by the German missionaries of Chaibasa. Still, he could realize the colonial design in spreading Christian religion at the expense of indigenous religious belief. He gathered inner strength to protest against the wrong doings of the missionaries. He was expelled from the mission. He embraced his own religion once again. Like the Aboriginal authors giving up their Christian name and accepting the Aboriginal nomenclature, Birsa too dropped his Christian name, 'Daud' and became 'Munda' as a mark of protest. He became a godsend tribal leader with a sacred place in tribal folkloric imagination. This messianic image helped in the process of tribal consolidation against the superior military power of the white man.

I would like to mention in this connection that there are many Mundari folk songs that celebrate the birth of Birsa as the only ray of hope for the rejuvenation of the entire tribal community. In fact, he reassured his fellow Mundas that they would get back the rights over the forest and land of Singhbhum through a resilient struggle against the Britishers, zamindars and moneylenders. They would dream of regaining the mountain and the forest, their sacred possessions, similar to the idea of the Dreamtime for the Australian Aborigines.

The Indian Forest Act-VII of 1878 empowered the British to conduct settlement operation in Singhbhum, Palamau and Manbhum districts. It made the tribals anxious of losing their traditional land holdings in the forest. The community leaders grew restive and there was every possibility of a fully armed and violent resistance. At this crucial juncture, Birsa changed the tone and direction of the unrest. Apart from his traditional religion, he also accepted Vaishnavism, a religious faith within the broad canopy of Hinduism, and essentially non-violent, resilient mode of religious belief system.

It was probably in 1890 that he went to Bandgaon where he came under the influence of Anand Panre who was a Munshi to Jagmohan Singh, the Zamindar of Bandgaon, and a Swansi. He was well-versed in the rudimentary form of Vaishnavism that prevailed in the area and with the Hindu epic-lore, and enjoyed some reputation and influence. Birsa occasionally accompanied him to Gorbera and Patpur, but spent most of his time at Bandgaon with him or his brother Sukhnath Panre. He stayed with the Panres for three years. He also met a Bamani and

preached there for two months. He adopted the sacred thread, worshipped the tulsi (Ocimum tenuiflorum) plants. It showed his zeal for ecological preservation. He used to put the sandal mark, familiarized himself with the Hindu concept of epochs and prohibited cow slaughter. This gesture clearly indicates his conversion to non-violent practice. At Patpur, his disciples claim, he had the rare vision of Lord Vishnu. It marked the consummation of the Vaishnav influence on their master.

Birsa's claim to be a messenger of God and the founder of a new religion sounded preposterous to the Christian mission. There were also within his sect converts from Christianity, mostly Sardars. His simple system of offering was directed against the church which levied a tax. And the concept of one God appealed to his people who found his religion economical saving them the expense of sacrifices. A strict code of conduct was laid down: theft, lying and murder were anathema. The act of begging was strictly prohibited.

In a way Birsa could experience religious integration in his own life by accepting different schools of Christianity and Vaishnavism apart from his tribal religious faith. This heightened his stature in the eyes of the indigenous people and he was popularly known as 'Dharti Aba' (Father of the Earth). His role as protector of nature and all natural resources has been highlighted in this appellation. In many Mundari folk songs there is a celebration of Birsa's transformation from an ordinary mortal to an extraordinary tribal leader. In Encyclopaedia Mundarica, vol.2(2009) it has been recorded–

> Suddenly the rumour spread that, whilst he was out in the forest with a companion, a flash of lightning passed over his face and transfigured it, and that at that instant God gave him his sacred mission. This was evidently taken from a similar incident in the life of Luther and the transfiguration seems to be taken from the New Testament. (567)

From an emissary of God, he was elevated to the stature of God for the Mundas. In an unprecedented way, he could consolidate the fierce energy of the tribals on the basis of a common religious faith – a combination of indigenous religious system and the Vaishnavite sentiment. The in-built resilience empowered the Mundari people to fight against the mighty British force on 9th January, 1900. The British army gunned down hundreds of almost unarmed Mundas.

Birsa Munda was arrested and put in the Ranchi prison. He died in a

mysterious way at the age of twenty five. Birsa Munda's leadership qualities may be compared to Mahatma Gandhi's role in national re-awakening. The rebellion was unsuccessful. Still, its influence on indigenous psyche was tremendous. The tribal people learnt the art of resilience under the guidance of Birsa Munda – the first indigenous nationalist leader. His death intensified the resolution of his community members although the exit of the leader affected them adversely. In "Aranyer Adhikar" (1977), a famous Bengali novel on the life of Birsa Munda by Mahasweta Devi, we find a combination of grit and complaint after the death of Birsa in a Mundari folk song:

Bolope bolope hega misi hon ko

Hoio dudugar hiju tana

Bolope

Ote re dudugar sirma re koaansi

Disum tabu bual tana

Bolope….

Taiom te do hora kape namia

Disum tabu nuba jana

Bolope… (21)

> [O brother! O sister! O boys! Go and save the lives of others. The heat of rebellion has warmed our resolute minds. The white men have invaded our land and forest. Be united, brothers. Otherwise, we'll not find any outlet from the impenetrable darkness of slavery. The mission of Lord Birsa has to be accomplished by us.] [4]

In 1856 the number of Jagirdars stood at about 600, and they occupied a part of village to 150 villages. By 1874, the rights of the old Munda or Oraon[5] chiefs had been severely curtailed by that of the farmers, introduced by the superior landlord. In many villages the indigenous people had completely lost their land rights.

To the challenges of agrarian breakdown and culture shock, Birsa along with other Munda compatriots responded through a series of spirited revolts. The movement aimed at reclaiming rights of the Mundas as the genuine proprietors of

the soil, and the banishment of middlemen and the British. Though he lived for only twenty-five years, he aroused the resilient mindset of the aborigines and mobilized them in a small town of Chhota Nagpur against the oppressive British regime.

The resilient life history of Birsa Munda will be remembered in the history of the indigenous people as a narrative of emancipation of his own people. As a visionary, he realized how the colonizers had usurped the land rights of the masses and vitiated the pristine environment to carry wealth abroad. Like the historic Mabo land rights verdict of 1992, his movement compelled the Britishers for the promulgation of the Chhota Nagpur Tenancy Act, 1908. This historic legislation being an offshoot of his resilient struggle, prohibited alienation of tribal land and also provision for restoration of the alienated land. He exhorted the aborigines to take pride in their ancestor's patriotism and to preserve their cultural heritage. The indigenous people were forcibly subjugated for long by the Dikus (non-tribals) and the intermediaries like Thikadars and money lenders including zamindars. The tribals who were for centuries the owners of the land and engaged in cultivation could not stand the trials before the British court and the indigenous practice of verbal agreement on land ownership could not be recognized by law. Consequently the Aborigines ended themselves up as bonded labourers in their own land of origin-land that was as spiritual to them as the concept of Dreamtime for the Aborigines in Australia.

Against this backdrop Birsa organized his struggle to rescue the Aborigines from the brink of survival and he commenced his protest march on 1st October 1894 for remission of forest dues. He gave his clarion call to the indigenous people. Apprehensions of failure did not deter him from his mission. Rather, he inspired the Mundas with the declaration of a new religious cult. The Munda sacrifices were declared abolished. Thursday, the birthday of Birsa, was substituted for Christian Sunday, and the Birsaites (followers of Birsa the God) observed his commandments for the future struggle in a resilient manner. In other words, he wanted the Mundas to end the rule of the Queen and re-establish their own kingdom.

In the post-Independence period the Indian Constitution has provided a lot of safeguards for the indigenous people to save them from the exploitation of the rich and privileged class. Much legislation has been passed both by the Parliament and the State Legislatures to protect them from the land grabbing by the non-tribals.

Recently, considerable amount of tribal land has been acquired for various development projects. It has resulted in large scale displacement and abolition of the indigenous people's tenancy rights. But the compensation package offered to the tribals is grossly inadequate. The resultant discontent has often turned violent and several separatist outfits have taken undue advantage of the situation by deploying the tribal youths in anti-national activities. Birsa Munda's dream can be realized only if the tribals are restored with their land within a limited time frame by suitable enactment.

IV

I conclude with the following observation: 'I had but that one arrow' says Chotti Munda, the hero of Mahasweta Devi's epic tale *Chotti Munda and His Arrow,* translated by Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak (2002). A 'magic' arrow that was the symbol of the pride, the wisdom, the culture, of their society, a society threatened with inevitable disintegration as its traditional social structures dissolved under the assault of 'national development'. Like many of Australian Aboriginal fictional works it raises questions about the place of the indigenous communities on the map of national identity, land rights and human rights and the great beauty of resilient defence of a desperate indigenous people, amongst others. In the *Translator's Afterword*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes:

> *Chotti Munda* repeatedly dramatizes subaltern solidarity: Munda, Oraon, and the Hindu outcastes must work together. Today such solidarity has a name: dalit[6]. The seduction of an identitarianism in the name of the dalit can learn a lesson here. With a degree of regret, Chotti accepts that cultural identity must be- to take an altogether inappropriate metaphor that is easy for the reader to understand- museumized… Between the performative of ritual transformed into performance and the power of a haunting magic anchored in practice the text charts the remote possibility of a resistant subalternity. (366-367)

Notes

1. The Working Note has been retrieved from an online archive that includes a special feature on Romaine Moreton. The full address is: www.asu.edu/pipercw

   center/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v1_5_2001/current/special-feature/moreton.html

2. The Mundas are tribal (Adivasi) people of the Chhota Nagpur Plateau region. They are found across Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Assam states of India and into parts of Bangladesh. Their language is Mundari, which belongs to the Munda sub-group of the Austro-Asiatic language family. There are estimated to be two million Mundari people.

3. In Encyclopaedia Mundarica the word "bir" has two meanings- "forest, jungle" (555) and "a brave, courageous man"(556). "Birsa Bhagoan" is also called *Dharti Aba*, the father of the world. He "was the founder of a new religion and the leader of both the attempts the Mundas made to free themselves from foreign domination.(565)

4. The Department of English, Vidyasagar University, Midnapur, West Bengal was inducted in the SAP-III, DRS-Phase 1 Programme of the University Grants Commission in April, 2009. The thrust area of this programme is "Documentation and Translation of the Oral and Folk Literature of the Dalit and Tribal People of West Bengal." This translation is a specimen of a proposed volume on the Mundari folk songs.

5. The Oraons are also tribal (Adivasi) people of the Chhota Nagpur Plateau region. Later, many of them migrated to North Bengal and Tripura as tea-plantation labourers. In Tripura many of them became Hindus. Their language is Kurukh. In tea gardens they speak special Bengali that is different from the standard version.

6. Dalit, also called Outcaste, is a self-designation for a group of people traditionally regarded as Untouchables. Dalits are a mixed population of numerous caste groups all over South Asia, and speak various languages.

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