Representation of 'Tribe' and 'Tribal Place' in Sanskrit Literature, Adivasi Oral Tradition and Colonial Ethnographic Accounts

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Abstract

This paper seeks to focus on in what way the tribal communities and their place of living were represented in pre-colonial Sanskrit texts which will help us to understand the trajectory of colonial discourse in which colonial ethnographers conceptualize their notion of the tribe. Colonial ethnographers who were deeply influenced by Sanskrit/Brahmanical tradition invented the caste and tribe of pre-colonial caste order. Indian history informs us about different ways of looking at forests and forest dwellers within ever-changing contexts and perceptions. The changing attitude towards forests has been reflected in different texts written in different languages such as Sanskrit, Prakrit, Tamil and other languages as also in oral tradition. Deriving the terms and concepts of tribes from ancient Indian Sanskrit texts the Orientalists and ethnographers of the nineteenth century constructed a dominant body of knowledge on Indian tribes. Not only in colonial India but in pre-colonial or even in the early Indian context, agricultural civilization and forests were regarded as civilized and wild. In the Adivasi oral tradition forest is not unknown and distant here but it is their home so they had a symbiotic relationship with the forest and trees.

Introduction

This paper seeks to focus on in what way the tribal communities and their place of living were represented in pre-colonial Sanskrit texts which will help us to understand the trajectory of colonial discourse in which colonial ethnographers

conceptualize their notion of a tribe. Colonial ethnographers who were deeply influenced by Sanskrit/ Brahmanical tradition invented the caste and tribe of pre-colonial caste order. As the early ethnographers incorrectly described as static entities, the revisionist scholars criticized the notion of 'ecological noble savage', 'pristine forests' and 'isolated tribal people'. Following the line of criticism raised by Christopher Bayly[1] and O'Hanlon[2], Sumit Guha[3] has challenged the contention of unchanging caste-based social order. There was a continuity of pre-colonial Brahamanic and Kshatriya ideology and tradition of caste-based social order. 'Nineteenth-century preoccupation with caste', as Vinita Damodaran argues, 'needs to be understood in terms of continuity with pre-colonial Brahmanic and Kshatriya precepts and traditions.'[4]

Writing on Adivasi Communities [5]

Though the term Adivasi came to be used in academic discourse in the 1980s in a different context the term translated as 'original inhabitant' for the first time was used in a political context in 1938 with the formation of Adivasi Mahasabha, the Great Council of Adivasis in Jharkhand. Later on, though the debate concentrated on tribes and aboriginal people, the term Adivasi was mobilized in the 1940s, by non-tribal nationalist and Colonial officials. From the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries travellers, colonial administrators, missionaries, and anthropologists provided a detailed description of the tribal communities of India. In their description, they provided images of landscape, description of customs and culture for making a difference and analysis.[6] In 1860, we find Valentine Ball and Edward Tuite Dalton. H. H. Risley wrote about tribal communities in the 1880s, 1890s, and 1900s but William Archer and John Henry Hutton documented the

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[1] Christopher Bayly: *Indian Society and the making of British Empire*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

[2] R. O'Hanlon: 'Cultures if Rule, Communities of Resistance: Gender Discourse and Tradition in Recent South Asian Historiographies' in *Social Analysis*, 1989, vol.25, pp. 94-114.

[3] Sumit Guha: *Environment and Ethnicity in India, 1200–1900*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

[4] Vinita Damodaran: 'Colonial Construction of the 'Tribe' in India: The Case of Chotanagpur' in *The Indian Historical Review*, 2006, vol.33, no.1, p.44.

[5] For historiographical account, see Vinita Damodaran and Sangeeta Dasgupta: 'Multiple World of the Adivasi: An Introduction' in *Modern Asian Studies,* 2022, vol. 56, Special Issue, pp.1353–1374, doi: 10.1017/S0026749X22000361. Sangeeta Dasgupta: 'Adivasi Studies: From a historian perspective' in *History Compass*, September 2018, vol.16, no.2. Prathama Banerjee: 'Writing the Adivasi History: Some Historiographical Notes' in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 2016, vol.53, no.1, pp.131-151.

[6] Damodaran and Dasgupta, *Op.Cit.,* pp.1359-1360.

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tribal communities in the 1930s and 1940s. Christopher von Haimendorf's writing appeared in the 1950s.

Immediately after Independence, the tribal question revolves rounds over the question of whether the tribal communities would be assimilated with the mainstream or preserved as an entity considered an important component of the cultural plurality of the nation.[7] In the 1960s, F. G. Bailey[8], Surajit Sinha[9], N. K. Bose[10], S. C. Dube[11], and Andre Beteille[12] contested the notion that tribal communities were bounded and isolated. These shifts, as Surajit Sinha argues, occurred because of the influence of American anthropology which led to producing micro-studies on cultural change. In the 1990s the tribal question set a new turn when it was viewed as a colonial construct and the contribution of anthropology played an important role in its formation. The academic discussion on tribes revolves round on two polar ends. One group of scholars like Sushana Davalle[13], Ajay Skaria[14] and Sumit Guha[15] conceptualise the tribe as a colonial construct which has no historical or sociological background. It was created through colonial theories and practices. Vinita Damodaran, on other hand, argues that colonial epistemology was built both based on European ideas of race, colonial environmental ideas and humanitarian issues and Brahamanical ideology of caste, values and laws. Scholars like B B Choudhury sought to find out the process of the extent of *Hinduization* among them. Biswamoy Pati observed that the conversion of the tribals into the Brahmanical order has been least discussed. He notes 'this had its specificities in the context of both colonial India as well as the world of the tribe. Unlike what seems to be the conventional understanding, Brahmanical Hinduism did convert and incorporate tribes. This was accompanied by

[7] Ibid.

[8] Frederick George Bailey: '"Tribe" and "caste" in India' in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 196, vol.5, no. 1, pp. 7–19.

[9] Surajit Sinha: 'Tribe-caste and Tribe-peasant continua in central India' in *Man In India*, January–March 1965, vol.45, no. 1, pp. 57–83.

[10] Nirmal Kumar Bose: *Tribal Life in India*. New Delhi, National Book Trust of India, 1971.

[11] Shyama Charan Dube: 'Introduction' in Shyama Charan Dube (ed.): *Tribal Heritage of India*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1977.

[12] Andre Beteille, *Six Essays in Comparative Sociology*. New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1974, pp. 58–74.

[13] Susana B. C. Devalle: *Discourse of Ethnicity: Culture and Protest in Jharkhand*. New Delhi, Sage Pub. , 1992, p.73.

[14] Ajay Skaria: 'Shades of wildness: tribe, caste and gender in western India' in *Journal of Asian Studies*, August 1997,vol.56, no. 3, pp. 726–745.

[15] Sumit Guha, *Op.Cit.*

simultaneously hierarchizing the tribes (and outcastes). Thus, the shifts and changes introduced by colonialism, especially the intervention, both reinforced and polarized this pre-colonial order, with a section of the affluent Adivasis, opting to get incorporated as well.[16]

In contemporary times, Adivasi communities are described as having distinct and separate identities. 'Tribes' were viewed romantically as primitive rival categories situated in the outer periphery of capitalist modernity. Situated outside the zone of the modern system, they were described as economically marginalized and politically expelled subjects. 'Tribes' were viewed as an 'archaic embodiment of authenticity' and' 'radicality' among the British, nationalists and the left. 'Historically', as Prathama Banerjee notes, 'the hill and forest peoples of India— who later became tribes- were neither stateless peoples, nor peoples outside history, nor simple, non-hierarchical, egalitarian communities.' They were engaged in politics for land and forest, in kingships, in relationships with other communities of the same branch, in special occupation and trading activities and even in war.[17] However, the term Adivasi is applied to 'Indigenous and Tribal Peoples' to indicate the program of international Indigenous movement that makes the political relationship of 'tribal specificity and local autochthony' with globalization, statehood and sub-nationalism. Thus, the assertion of indigeneity is operated through the concept of Adivasi.[18]

Forests and Forest Dwellers in Sanskrit Literature

Indian history informs us about different ways of looking at forests and forest dwellers within ever-changing contexts and perceptions. The changing attitude towards forests has been reflected in different texts written in different languages such as Sanskrit, Prakrit, Tamil and other languages as also in oral tradition. Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer has shown the relationship between forest(*vana/aranya*) and settlement(*grama*). Romila Thaper further explored the relationship in the context of early Indian history. Early Sanskrit texts including Vedas explained the distinction between *grama* and *vana*. As the *grama* denotes settlements it was an ordered social system, disciplined, known and lastly, it was a highly civilised society in those days. But *vana* means forest which was different from *grama*

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[16] B. B. Choudhury: 'Society and Culture of the Tribal World in Colonial Eastern India: Reconsidering the notion of 'Hinduization' of Tribes' in H. Jha (ed.): *Perspective on Indian Society and History: A Critique.* New Delhi, Monohar, 2002, pp-23-79. Biswamoy Pati: 'Survival as Resistance: Tribal in Colonial Orissa' in *The Indian Historical Review,* January 2006, vol.33, no.1, pp.175-201.

[17] Prathama Banerjee: *Op. Cit.,* p.132.

[18] Daniel J. Rycroft and Sangeeta Dasgupta(eds.): *The Politics of Belonging in India: Becoming Adivasi*. London and New York : Routledge, 2011, pp.1-2.

society. It was a place of disorder, unfamiliar where predators and strange creatures lived. The distances from the forest widened with the transformation of villages into an urban centres. The people who lived in the forest were regarded as less civilised and backward. Their social norms and values were quite different from those of civilised society.[19] Different Forest dwellers such as Nishad, Bhilla, Pulinda, Sabara and other forest people resemble the description of the *raksasa* in the epic literature and these were their generic names. Romila Thaper argues, '[I]n folk versions, the images are often reverse of those in texts, and one has to ask why this is so. Whether the literary tradition is the only source, the perspective is inevitable of the grama[settlement]. This is why the collecting of oral traditions is crucial to obtain a view from the other side.'[20]Forest was regarded as the abode of ascetics and renouncers but established settlement means a regular socially ordered social system. It was also sometimes observed as a continuum. Romila Thapar argues that the perception associated with it was not fixed or identical despite the existence of duality. When the forest was romanticized it was a fictive paradise, an imagined alternative. In other ways, it was observed as the abode of the fearful habitat of demons. With the change of images, their role also changes. There is a clear contrast between Sanskrit and Adivasi oral traditions. The images were reversed. In Sanskrit texts, the perspective was the *grama* or settlement. This study also seeks to explore the view of the other side through the Adivasi oral tradition.

Tribal people of India were referred to as *rakshasa* (demon), *asura*, *danuva*, *savara*, *pulindadas* (slave). In *Rigveda*, tribals were inferior because of their physical characteristics, such as black skin, fierce eyes, and deformed noses.[21] They were depicted as culturally substandard. Physically and ethnologically there were identified as distinct. Though they were also described as robbers and demons (*pisacas* and *bhuts*) their honesty, gratitude and innocence were also mentioned. In *Aranyakanda* of *Ramayana*, there was a story where a forest-dweller woman Sabari provided Ram berries after she had tasted them. This is an incident of an impure act from the perspective of *kshetra*.[22]

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[19] Romila Thapar: 'Forests and Settlements' in Mahesh Rangarajan (ed.): *Environmental Issues in India: A Reader*. New Delhi, Pearson Education, 2007, p. 34.

[20] *Ibid*., p.106.

[21] S.C. Roy: *The Mundas and their Country* (Originally published in 1912). Ranchi, Catholic Press, 1995.

[22] G D Sontheimer: 'Hinduism: The Five Components and their interactions in G D Sontheimer and Herman Kulke (eds.): *Hinduism Reconsidered*. New Delhi, Manohar, 2001, p.314. G D Sontheimer: 'The Vana and the Ksetra: The Tribal Background of Some Famous Cults' in H. Kulke and G C Tripathi(eds.): *Religion and society in eastern India*. Bhubaneshwar, The Eschmann Memorial Fund, 1994, p.140.

Forests were regarded in early India as the site of the hunt, hermitage and exile. Hunting was the activity of the chiefs and kings and it was a desirable workout. The forest dwellers like Vyadh, and Nishada who lived based on hunting and gathering were regarded with hatred, treated as uncivilized and sinful and inferior to low caste status. Hunter-gatherer societies claimed the forests despite banning their way of livelihood depended on hunting. The dichotomy of nature and culture is reflected through the activity of hunting. Kings and princes often go on hunts as they regarded it as a sport. This was described as the dangerous destruction of nature and animals. These activities did not distort the images of the high status of royalty.

Through the hunt, we came to inform about forest dwellers. These tended to be imagined as *rakshas* or else human beings with supernatural faculties. *Rakshas* were generally been described as demons and as imaginary. In the epics, they were described as unknown like the forest dwellers who hindered hunting and harassed the *risis* who established settlements or ashrams in the forests. If the forest is viewed as a place outside the order and the raja needed to control it and the hunt was the beginning. This subordination was attained with the establishment of ashrams in the forests. As Romila Thapar observes, ' …at the same time it may be seen as a precursor of what later evolved into *agraharas*-grants of land to Brahmins, either in forests or wastelands or grants of cultivated land. The *asrama* is at one level an intrusion into the forests by the people of the grama, an intrusion sought to be stemmed by those living in the forest.'[23]

Non-*Dharmasastra* literature provides three specific geographical zones and different perspectives on the habitation of tribal people. The Chotanagpur plateau in the east and Narmada and Chambal Valley in the west were described as the ideal setting of their habitat. These tribal societies were pushed into the forested region because of people's migration to and from the plain region and their habitat region was also open to outside influence. *Aitareya Brahmana* for the first time mentioned the people who live outside of civilized society. People like Sabara, Pulinda, Andhra, Pundaras, Mutibas were described as *dasyus* and inhabited beyond the border. *Amarakosa*, a fifth-century text described the people such as Beda, Sabara, Kirata, Pulinda as *mleccha-jatis* because they sustained a common way of life. *Kathasaritsagar* informs that Sabara and Pulinda people had powerful control over the forest and hills of Vindhyas region. The writer inter-changeably used the names such as Bhilla, Sabar and Pulinda because he was well aware of these people and their society. Brahmanical writers were well known about these people and they have never included them as caste or *jatis* in the *Dharmasastra* literature. Aloka Parasher- Sen argues, 'The fact that many of these groups

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[23] Thapar, *Op. Cit.*, pp.112-13.

continued to remain isolated in the forest and mountain regions of the subcontinent for a long time, was perhaps the main reason for their exclusion from the *varna-jati* system.'[24] Generic names like Kirata, Nishada, Sabara were often used instead of the term *mleccha* which reflected the differences between these social groups. When these terms were used in two oppositional situations it indicates a complex interaction between Brahmanical society and the tribal society.[25] With the expansion of civilized society (*kshetra*) the forest (*vana/aranya*) whether we may consider it as a spatial, spiritual, religious, sociological or ecological concept- gradually reduced. Tribal people were gradually transformed into caste groups and received a place in the hierarchical *varna-jati* system.[26]

Forest and Forest People in Adivasi Oral Tradition

In the Adivasi oral tradition forest is not unknown and distant here but it is their home. From oral tradition (*binti*)[27], we find an idea of what way the Adivasis established their settlement in the forest. From a Santal song, we find a clear idea of this pattern: *Okoe mae ciyalet' ho bir disam do? / Okoe mae doholet' ho atore paeri?Maranburu ciyalet' ho birdisom do. / Jaher erae doho let' ho atore paeri.*[28] [Who had searched a deep jungle for the first time? / Who had kept crystal clear water in the village? / *Maran Buru* had searched a deep jungle. / *Jaher Era* had kept crystal clear water in the village.]. We should understand how a village was founded. The process began when some of them under a leader explored a suitable site within the forest. In site selection, suitability depended on whether *sal{Shorea robusta* Gaertn.f. (Dipterocar pacea)}*, mahua {Madhuca indica*, Gmelin (Combretaceae)} and other trees, crystal clear water, cultivable land and irrigation facility was available or not. Another criterion was to ascertain whether the balance between supernatural entities (good and evil spirits) existed.[29] The Adivasis believed that there were different types of *bhuts* or spirits such as household *bhut*, sept *bhuts*, village *bhuts*, village *devtas*, wandering *bhuts*, common *devtas*. They

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[24] Aloka Parasher- Sen: ''Foreigner' and 'Tribe' as Barbarian (*Mleccha*) in Early North India' in Aloka Parasher- Sen(ed.): *Subordinate and Marginal Groups in Early India*. New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2004, p.299.

[25] *Ibid*., p.302.

[26] Sontheimer, *Op. Cit.*, p.164.

[27] P.O. Bodding (Translator): *Traditions and Institutions of the Santals: Horkoren Mare Hapramko Reak Katha*. New Delhi: Bahumukhi Prakashan,1994. This original Santali text was based on the oral tradition as told by the Guru Kolean and written by L.O. Skrefsrud in 1887.

[28] Shruhid Kumar Bhowmik: *Saotali gan o kabita sankalan*. New Delhi, Sahitya Academy, 2005, p.17.

[29] Sitakanta Mahapatra: *The Tangled Web*. Bhubaneswar. Orissa Sahitya Academy, 1993, 31.

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considered Earth both as a *devta* and as a *bhut*. The village priest deals with both the deities and spirits of the village landscape whilst the Ojha deals with all the mischievous spirits who are responsible for all kinds of sickness and some spirits who have been disregarded by people. To determine the presence of good spirits at the selected place for village settlement one interesting test was conducted with the cock and charmed rice.[30] Then, the Adivasi community cleared the jungle for the homestead fields, using the trees they had cut down for building houses while burning away the remaining timber etc. Running along the middle of the place they had chosen for the village, they kept a village street, and at the end of this, they arranged a sacred grove.[31]

The village became their permanent habitat which they left more or less on two occasions. If an epidemic came causing the death of men and cattle, the villagers deserted the entire village and migrated to a new place to avoid misery. There was a general belief in most Adivasi societies that unmixed good or unmixed evil was not desirable either for an individual or for the community. They believed that when this balance was broken in an individual's life, there was disease and ill health, followed inexorably by death. Similarly, there was a quarrel, and disharmony among families and groups in the villages, and epidemics and calamities befell the whole community when the balance was upset in society.[32] The next occasion occurred when due to the rise in population; people had to shift to a new place in search of a fresh site.

From hunter gather forager to Adivasi peasant

The oral tradition of the Santals reflected the transformation of the Adivasi material life. Ramdas Tudu Reska (1951) recorded their oral tradition (*binti*) in his text entitled '*Khewal Bangsa Dharam Punthi*'. He describes how the Kherwal Santals learnt about making different kinds of agricultural instruments from their God Marangburu.[33] However, the Munda myth also informs about the legend of plough making. Not only for the Jharkhand Adivasis but also for the Northeastern tribal people shifting cultivation/'jhuming' was a form of cultivation. In colonial ethnography, the practice of pastoralism and shifting cultivation was represented as backwardness.[34] The pre-colonial agrarian base was developed during the colonial period. According to P. P Mahapatra, three sets of variable like demography,

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[30] P. O. Bodding *Op.Cit.*, pp. 100-101. A similar story was collected by the author from Sri Deben Soren, Dulalgora, Neturi, October 10, 2007.

[31] *Ibid.*, p.16.

[32] P.P. Mahato: *Bhater Adivasi o Dalita Samaj.* Kolkata, Sujan Publication, 1995, p.16.

[33] Tudu Reska, Ramdas: *Khewal Bagsa Dharam Punthi* (Santali Text). Calcutta 1951.

[34] Gunnel Cederlof: *Landscape and the Law: Environmental Politics, Regional Histories and Contests over Nature.* Ranikhet, Permanent Black, 2008.

institutional structure and market were responsible for this factor. In the case of the Dangis of Gujrat, Ajay Skaria has shown that the transformation from shifting cultivators to settling cultivation occurred due to the adoption of upper caste values.[35] But in the case of Jharkhand, Ashoka Kumar Sen has shown that advanced agrarian communities like Mathurabasis, Goalas, Kurmis, Koiris had emigrated in the region from neighbouring districts of Bihar and Orissa.[36] The non-tribal impact was not always advantageous for the Adivasi people. Landlord and moneylender systems gradually started to exploit the Adivasis. Moneylenders gave advances to the cultivators and in return, he claimed doubled from the peasants. Colonial administrative mechanisms for regular payment of land revenue and development of the market made the cultivators conscious about conducting agricultural activity seriously. Implication Colonial forest rules since the 1890s was another factor for the expansion of agriculture. This agricultural expansion was done by establishing a new village by reclaiming jungle or by reclaiming the forests of an already established village. From the nineteenth century onwards cultivation emerged as the main livelihood of villagers of the Chotanagpur Division.

Impact of Sanskritik images of tribes and 'tribal place' on the colonial ethnographers

There was a significant impact of Sanskritic description of the communities on colonial ethnographers like Justice Campbell, E.T. Dalton, W.W. Hunter and J. Muir. Justice Campbell conceptualized his idea on the tribes of India based on the information collected from Sanskrit text. He comments: "…the Aborigines generally in ancient times, is evident from Purans, where they are described in extremely uncomplimentary terms as 'vile monster', 'allied to monkeys, 'as black as cows, 'of flattened features and of dwarfish stature'.[37] As Orientalist scholar, J. Muir mentioned Sanskritik representation of tribe: '…there are various other classes in different places, Pisachas, Rakshasas, Pretas, various tribes of Mlechhas.'[38] Based on the works of the orientalist scholars, E. T Dalton also mentioned that tribes were represented as 'worshipers of mad gods', 'haters of Brahmins', 'ferocious lookers', 'inhuman', 'flesh-eaters', 'devourers of life',

[35] A. Skaria: *Hybrid Histories: Frontiers, and Wilderness in Western India*. New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999, p.66.

[36] Ashoka Kumar Sen: *Indigeneity, Landscape and History: Adivasi Self-fashioning in India*. New York, Routledge, p.140.

[37] Justice Campbell: 'The Ethnology of India' in *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, 1866, Special No, vol.35, Part II,., p.23.

[38] J. Muir: *Original Sanskrit Texts on the Origin and History of the People of India*, Vol.1. London: Trubner &Co, 1872, p.141.

'possessed of magical power', 'changing their shapes at will'.[39]   However, they pointed out the hegemonic strategy of the Hindus.[40]

In colonial discourse, the idea of the wild landscape was associated with the savage mind. Alexander von Humbolt has shown in the case of Native Americans that a savage mind is created in the savage landscape.[41] Sometimes it is assumed that during the early age, the forests and the landscape were untouched and un-manipulated and thus, the forests remained pristine. Adivasi life, at that time, was intermingled with Nature.[42] As E. T. Dalton described Chotangpur and its people, 'The plateau averages more than 2,000 feet above the sea level, it is on all sides somewhat difficult of access, and it is owing to the security thus given, that the primitive tribe, still found on it, retained for ages so much of their independence and idiosyncrasy.'[43] This stereotype is, however, challenged by recent scholars like Vinita Damodaran.[44] Contesting the notion of ecological romanticism, Shepard Krech comments, 'Many native peoples themselves draw on a tradition of texts promulgating noble imagery that has generally had deeper roots in European self-criticism than in indigenous realities'.[45] However, the truth is even more complicated than it appears. In the case of Manbhum, most Adivasis used to establish villages in the forest after clearing a forest patch with a nearby water resource. Sometimes they created some artificial water resources within their communities. Thus; they did change and manipulate their surrounding landscape. These activities certainly brought some ecological impact. However, because of low population pressure and less per capita consumption, they did not result in ecological devastation. The rate at which they exploited their surrounding resource at a local scale could keep pace with the regeneration and restoration rate of the natural and ecological process.[46] David Lee comments: 'Whether they represent

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[39] E T Dalton: 'The "Kols" of Chota-Nagpore' in *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, 1866, Special No, vol.35, Part II, p.158.

[40] Ashoka Kumar Sen. *Op.Cit.*, p.18.

[41] Alexander von Humbolt*: Personal narrative of travels to the equinoctial regions of the new continent 1799-1804*. London,1822.

[42] S. C. Roy, *Op. Cit.*, p.58.

[43] E. T. Dalton, *Op. Cit.*, p.153.

[44] Vinita Damodaran, *Op. Cit.*, p.61.

[45] *Krech III, Shephered:* The Ecological Indian. *New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2000, p. 216.*

[46] Nirmal Kumar Mahato: *Sorrow Songs of Woods: Adivasi-Nature Relationship in the Anthropocene in Manbhum*. New Delhi: Primus, 2020, p. 46.

aboriginal tribal people-Adivasi or not, such dwellers would have populated the forest vastness, just as they lived in remnants of the forest today'.[47]

The earlier thought of the forest and disrespect of forest people was reinforced by colonial rule. During that time forests became an area to be exploited for agricultural expansion and forest resources. Categorizing the colonial Indian society on the binary of tribe and caste, for a long period, created a political and intellectual misunderstanding. Social Anthropology of India documented the differences between tribe and caste. As Prathama Banerjee notes, '…it was argued that tribes were segmentary, caste was organic; tribes were isolated and self – sufficient, castes were interactive and inter-dependant; tribes 'animist', castes Hindu; tribe egalitarian, castes hierarchical and so on.'[48] In the Indian context, the political and economic government of tribes was identified as a space 'excluded' and 'non-regulated'. In the case of labour and credit markets, the tribe was represented as an isolated, a-historical and pre-political body.[49] With the introduction of the Permanent Settlement (1793), the Ryotwari Settlement and the India Forest Acts (1865 and 1878), John Locke's political thought was implemented in colonial India, as Judy Whitehead observes. Behind the classification and administration of Indian landscapes, the concept of wasteland was considered a founding binary opposition, as opposed to productive land. The social groups of 'tribes' and castes were supposedly attached to the landscapes of wasteland and value-producing land, respectively. Prathama Banerjee further notes, 'Associated with wildness, wilderness and savagery since the nineteenth century, the category of wasteland defined peoples who would become most vulnerable to dispossession and/or enclosure—namely people who would be called "tribe"'.[50] Thus, the patchwork of forests and fields was considered their 'natural habitat'.[51] W.W. Hunter observes that 'the aboriginal races have held their ground far more successfully in Manbhum than in Hazaribagh'.[52] Large portions of Manbhum were covered with dense forests and the soil was not sufficiently productive making it difficult to make it profitable for agricultural production. The 'aboriginal' and 'semi-aboriginal races' got their subsistence from edible forest

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[47] David Lee: 'The Natural History of the *Ramayana*' in C K Chapple and M E Tucker (eds.): *Hinduism and Ecology: The Interactions of Earth, Sky and Water*. Havard, Havard University Press, 2000, pp.254-255.

[48] Prathama Banerjee *Op. Cit.*, p.134.

[49] Ibid., p.133.

[50] *Ibid.*, p.141.

[51] K. Sivaramakrishnan: *Modern Forests: Statemaking and Environmental Change in Colonial Eastern India*. New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 87.

[52] W W Hunter: *A Statistical Accounts of Bengal*.vol. XVII, 1877, rept., New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 1976, pp.274–5.

products and they contented themselves with scanty cultivation. As the Grant Trunk Road crossed through the northern portion of Manbhum, it did not influence the southern portion, where the 'aboriginal races' were found in large numbers. In the early administrative history, the Bhumij Kols of Manbhum had been described as the *chuars* or freebooters.

They were a stronger and more tenacious race than the Santals, who were driven from north-west Hazaribagh. They resisted the encroachments of Hindus with their capacity. They were standing on midway between the Mundas of Lohardanga and the Hos of Singhbhum. Hindustanis, were more pushing and adventurous pioneers of civilization than the Bengalis of Manbhum. However, the Hindustanis had ousted the Santals from Hazaribagh. It was difficult to prove that Bengali emigration had started from the beginning of British rule. In Hazaribagh, bulks of landholders gained their possession with the commencement of British rule. From the Santal oral accounts, it is revealed that Santals were driven from Hazaribagh by the Hindu emigrants due to their gradual encroachments. So, the Santals immigrated to Manbhum in large numbers.[53] In Hunter's perception of 'primitive places' the inhospitable forest, environment created an empty niche. As the Manbhum district possessed a dense forest in the precolonial and early colonial eras, it became an ideal 'tribal place'. It was protected from the immigration of plain land people as the 'stronger and tenacious race' Bhumij resisted the immigration into the district with their might. In the case of 'tribal place' making, the British sought to alleviate the exploitative influence on 'tribal' society to restore the 'tribal republic'. After the conflict between the zamindar and the Santal peasants in Tundi in the 1870s, Dalton wrote, 'the old Santal izaradar should be restored . . . the main object is to keep it in the hands of the *majhi* or headman.'[54] The naming scheme was another tool to identify a 'tribal place'. In this context of 'tribal place', Sir H. H. Risley pointed out that the name of the district came from aboriginal elements. He ascribed the origin of the name of Manbhum to the Dravidian 'tribe' of Mal referred to by Pliny as *Malli.* Interestingly, the Mal 'tribe' showed apparent similarity of the Saurian family with others like Rajmahal Paharias, Oraons and Sabars.[55] Among some of the stereotypes of the tribes, tribes

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[53] *Ibid.*

[54] West Bengal State Archives, No.727, Board of Revenue, dated Chotangpur.4 April 1872., From Colonel E. T. Dalton, C.S.I., Commissioner of Chotanagpur, To, Colonel E.A. Rowlat, Deputy Commissioner of Manbhum, para 6.

[55] H. Coupland: *Bengal District Gazetteer: Manbhum.* Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Press, 1911, pp.1–2.

had a belief in magical power. As Campbell writes, 'they have a great reputation as sorcerers, and themselves believing in a religion of demons and witchcraft.'[56]

Conclusion

Deriving the terms and concepts of tribes from ancient Indian Sanskrit texts the Orientalists and ethnographers of the nineteenth century constructed a dominant body of knowledge on Indian tribes. Not only in colonial India but in pre-colonial or even in the early Indian context, agricultural civilization and forests were regarded as civilized and wild. The kings or rulers in Early India always sought to expand agricultural land to the extent of forest and convert the forest dwellers into a caste system. Adivasi oral tradition informs that against this encroachment there was contestation occurred between Kherwar Adivasi people and the *dikus* in early India. As the Kherwals found the condition of settled life as truth under the *sal*(Shorea robusta) tree which they regard as *sari- sarjam*(a tree connected with this truth) so they were sympathetic to forest and trees. Therefore, the relationship between tribe and civilization is needed to be understood from a broad perspective and through an interdisciplinary methodology. This is necessary because the livelihood of forest-based communities received attention all over the world in the age of the Anthropocene.

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[56] J. Campbell: *Op. Cit*, p.31.