SITUATING THE "TRIBE" IN INDIA: THE LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY DISCOURSE ON THE CENTRAL PROVINCES AND THE NAGA HILLS

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled **"Situating the Indian "Tribe": Late 19th and early 20th Century Discourses in the Central Provinces and the Naga Hills"**, submitted by Sanghamitra Misra is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of this University. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University and is her own work.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Sanghamitra Misra

(Sanghamitra Misra)

INTRODUCTION

This work proposes to study the idea of the Indian "tribe" in various discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial India, particularly in the Central Provinces and the Naga Hills. It would centre its analysis primarily around what were the "visible" and "dominant" discourses on the "tribe" during this period, the colonial official, ethnographic, missionary and the nationalist, although travelogues and memoirs would also be looked at. Further, as an exercise in tracing the nodal points in the history of the idea of the Indian "tribe", this work would take up for discussion the writings and ideas of Verrier Elwin, a pioneer anthropologist who rejected several accepted notions of the "tribe" and offered an alternative paradigm.

The study identifies the two themes of "race" and "evolution" as central to the discourse on the "tribe" during this period. An analysis of the representation of this category in the various writings would be concerned chiefly, therefore, with their negotiation with these themes as also with the intellectual currents which contributed towards this representation. The social history of the late nineteenth century and of the first half of the twentieth would also be kept in constant focus because of its obvious interaction with the discourses under study.

Constructing a narrative of the idea of the Indian "tribe", this work would begin with an analysis of the representation of the "tribe" in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Marked by a growing British material and evangelical

interest in the inhabitants of these areas, this century also saw an increase in the need of the colonial state to identify and effectively classify the subject population. As the first chapter would argue, the term "tribe", far from being a primordial, ethnographic fact of Indian life, was actually a product of the process of the construction of social categories by the colonial state. This process, which attributed the Indian aboriginal with fixed and immutable categories, was a reflection of a larger process of the essentialisation of India by the West.

The theory of Social Evolution, its centrality in the discourses on the "tribe" and the significance of the anthropometric intervention as a means of enforcing racial distinctions are areas which would receive special emphasis. Drawing upon the arguments of Crispin Bates,[1] Bernard Cohn[2] and Meena Radhakrishna,[3] among others, this chapter would explore the links between imperial domination and the theories of race and evolution as also the much debated relationship between colonialism and anthropology. Contrary to portraying the discourses under study as largely homogenous, in particular the colonial discourse , this chapter would attempt to identify trends from within these writings which questioned apparently established notions about the Indian

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1. "Race,Caste and Tribe in Central India: The Early Origins of Indian Anthropometry" in Peter Robb (ed) The Concept of Race in South Asia, Delhi, 1995.

2. An Anthropologist Among Historians and Other Essays, Delhi, 1990.

3. "Colonialism, Evolutionism and Anthropology -- A Critique of the History of Ideas, 1850-1930", Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi, 1997.

"tribe". The occupational and functional categorisation of tribes and castes by certain colonial officials and ethnographers, for instance, rejected the racial notions that appeared to be characteristic of the late nineteenth century colonial writings.

The second chapter would bring the narrative upto the first half of the twentieth century.Set during a period which can be identified as one of the nodal points in the history of the idea of the Indian "tribe", the primary thrust of this section would be towards understanding the contours of the debates over the representation of the "tribe"in the colonial official and nationalist circles. While these debates appear to have taken place between two apparently opposed and irreconcilable camps of "isolationists" (comprising primarily of certain anthropologist - administrators) and "assimilationists" (who identified themselves with nationalist ideals), the existence of significant parallelisms and divergences need careful analysis. This chapter would attempt to go beyond the assimilationist critique of the isolationist attempt at "primitivising" and "essentialising" the Indian aboriginal and the isolationist criticism of what were identified as assimilationist attempts to forcefully integrate tribes into the caste order. It would seek to identify the absence or presence of conceptual breaks in these discourses and assess their ability to transgress racial and evolutionist notions of the "tribe" which had characterised the writings of the preceding century.

As in the earlier chapter, the identification of contesting trends from within the various writings would be a concern of this chapter. Of interest therefore, is the emergence of an Indian anthropological discourse in the first decades of the twentieth century and the alternate and independent line of thinking that the writings of S.C.Roy, for instance, proposed. The politically turbulent 30's and 40's when ideas often acquired meanings beyond their immediate context and were affected by forces other than those emerging from the exigencies of colonial transformation, provides the context within which this discussion is to be located.

The writings and ideas of Verrier Elwin , the "self-taught self-trained anthropologist", who drew on the experiences of his life in the Central Provinces and the North-Eastern part of the country to write extensively on the inhabitants of these regions, would be the focus of the concluding chapter. Credited with having formulated the 'tribal question' in a striking and contentious manner in a period when the problems of the tribals had come to occupy the centre stage of Indian politics, Elwin constructed an image of the "tribe" which was much debated in the other discourses on the Indian "tribe" during this period. In an apparent rejection of the centrality of the themes of race and evolution in the representation of the "tribe", Elwin made the "celebration" of the tribal way of life a defining feature of his several ethnographies and monographs. Highly critical of the assimilationist position which tended to perceive the tribes as another "backward" section of the larger Hindu community, Elwin's writings

advocated policies which would help preserve tribal life by protecting it from the "onslaught of Christian missionaries and Hindu nationalists". The identification of apparently alternate conceptualisations of the Indian "tribe" in Verrier Elwin's work, forms therefore, the focus of this chapter.

To sum up, this work proposes to explore some of the varied representations of the Indian "tribe" and would attempt to understand certain historical factors which could have contributed to the centrality of the themes of "race" and "evolution" in these representations. The possible marginalisation of other theories as also of the different perceptions of the "tribe" that they could have offered, would be related areas of research. The dissertation would also be a study of the attitudes of the colonial official, the anthropologist, the missionary and the Congress nationalist towards the tribe's distinctiveness , its relationship with mainstream culture and the political and social future that they envisaged for it.

CHAPTER - I

The image of the "tribe" in the missionary and ethnographic writings of the late nineteenth century in India, would be the concern of this chapter. While tracing the process of construction of the category of the "tribe" from among the varied and contesting ideas in these writings and locating it within the broader intellectual currents and social history of the period, it would attempt to demonstrate the centrality of the themes of "race" and "evolution" in the categorisation of the "tribe."

That the grounds for distinction between "tribes" and castes were already being laid by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was evident in some of the ethnographic and official writings of the period. They seem to indicate that the hill and forest communities were different from those in the plains. In the 1840's, for instance, Bhils were being described consistently as "aboriginal, forest or hill tribes".[1] By 1852, a list of differences between the "Hindus" and the "aborigines" was already being constructed,[2] and by the latter half of the nineteenth century, this distinction appears to have been crystallised in the colonial ethnographic and missionary writings on the "tribe". Although administrative necessities appear to have acted as the compelling urge behind the

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1. A. Skaria, "Shades of Wildness," Journal of Asian Studies, Vol.56, No.3, p.729.

2. A. Skaria cites such a list from an essay by John Briggs (Two lectures on the Aboriginal Races of India," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 13:275-309, 1852). In it, Briggs draws up a range of differences between the two communities: "Hindus had caste divisions, aborigines did not, Hindus did not eat beef, aborigines did; Hindu widows did not remarry, aborigine widows did." Skaria op.cit, 1997, p.729.

construction of such distinctions in these writings, imperial needs in the Indian colony and intellectual, material and evangelising interests in Britain, were all inextricably linked together in the search and categorisation of the "tribe" from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.

The efforts of the British colonial government to collect systematic information about several aspects of Indian society and economy, were to act as a powerful impulse behind the categorisation of the "tribe", and forms the immediate context within which its representation is to be located during this period. The state's attempt was to identify groups and effectively classify them within structured grids to facilitate better administration.[3] Caste, for instance, was seen, along with religion, as "a space for controlling people by social and cultural values."[4] The objectives of the colonial state were furthered by the twin processes of census and mapping. With a substantial body of systematic knowledge on the colonised, the census "shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominions, rendering visible, through categorisation, the subjects it ruled."[5] Similarly, mapping suited perfectly the colonial administrator's drive to erect a frame-work of categories from within the social order while simultaneously concretising the territorial imperatives of the colonial state. By endowing the "tribe" with certain definitive characteristics and aiding

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3. C. Pinney "Colonial Anthropology in the laboratory of mankind," in C.A. Bayly (ed.) An Illustrated History of Modern India, Delhi , 1991, p.258.

4. R. Pant, "The cognitive status of caste," Indian Economic and Social History Review, 1987, 24, 2, p.156.

5. B. Anderson, Imagined Communities, New York, 1991.

the state's attempts to locate the "strange" within a "familiar" frame of reference, anthropological writings of this period appeared to have furthered this search for order. Tribes were identified as "a section of the populace about which the British were least informed and from which they felt they had the most to fear,"[6] and hence as a group about whom objective knowledge was necessary. By giving "the means of creating the reassuring certainty that the variety of social groups were all identifiably distinct elements which could be arranged legibly and clearly,"[7] anthropology proceeded to identify its goals closely with the objectives of the colonial state and attempted to transform tribes into a more visible category. The colonial state's objectification of its subjects, the role of anthropological writings in this process and the relationship between colonialism and anthropology are issues that need to be explored.

The interaction between academic and administrative investigation is a recurrent feature of this period, well embodied in H.H. Risley's emphatic statement on the importance of ethnographic surveys for efficient administration in the "Eastern Society... where it was impossible to define where administration ended and science began."[8] Like Risley, other colonial ethnographers of the late nineteenth century such as W.W. Hunter, Edward Dalton, Charles Grant and John Butler, among others, were all in active government service when their works were published. Their 'treatises' on tribes and castes were the products

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6. C. Bates, "Race, Caste and Tribe in Central India," in Peter Robb (ed.), Concept of Race in South Asia, Delhi, 1995, p.234.

7. C. Pinney, op.cit, 1995, p.253.

8. H.H. Risley, Tribes and Castes of Bengal, Vol.1, 1891, p.vi.

of administrative needs, funded by the colonial state and aided by its personnel. With most of the ethnographic writings being authored by colonial officials, the growth of the discipline of anthropology within the unequal power structure of colonialism was all the more explicit in this period.

Apart from the closely related ethnographic and colonial official discourses, early missionary activities among certain "tribes" like the Gonds of the Central Provinces and the Nagas and Garos in the north eastern part of the country, produced a sizeable body of literature on the Indian "tribe". The initial forays into tribal areas in both these regions, by Christian missionaries, were made as early as the 1830's and the 1840's, and although variances persisted, by the latter half of the century it is possible to construct some form of an early missionary perception of the Indian "tribe". The missionary activities among the tribes during this period may well have differed from the colonial state in their primary objective of individual conversions. However, in several important ways, missionary writings continued to reproduce and reinforce the colonial state's image of the "tribe" through the missionary's identification with the "enlightened western civilization" and its civilizing mission among the "heathens". Although not directly a part of the edifice of the colonial state (unlike most of the ethnographers of the period) missionaries in both the Central Provinces and the Naga Hills were often the beneficiaries of the colonial state and accomplished their objectives "under the full toleration of the English government... encouraged and supported by some of its highest functionaries."[9]

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9. Letter of Brown and Cutter, May 10, 1838 (as quoted in H.K. Barpujari, American Missionaries, 1986, p.15).

Such an association between the administrator and the missionary, along with their shared perceptions of the Enlightenment and "progressiveness" as characteristic of the western society, were to have important implications in the missionary's conceptualisation of the "tribe". For instance, in the context of the Naga Hills, where coercive force was sought to be minimised as was deemed consistent with the tutelary aims of colonisation, missionary writings aided in the construction of the necessary image of the Naga as the "poor, ignorant heathen."[10]

The use of missionary writings as sources for their ethnographic works by several colonial officials, including Charles Grant and Edgar Thurston, can perhaps be cited as an evidence of this association. Thus, the bulk of the Central Provinces Gazeteer (1871) of Charles Grant's introductory entry on 'aboriginal' relies on the racial speculations of Stephens Hislop, an early Christian missionary in the area. Commenting on the use of missionary writings as material for anthropological accounts, Meena Radhakrishna writes: "Missionaries, in fact, were a universal and very important source of ethnographic material because of the subjects they chose to work with,... highlighting the bizarre elements in the daily routine of the people they worked with... These examples indicate an interlocking of the government's propaganda material with the academic anthropological research which in turn depended on missionaries and travellers for basic data."[11]

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10. "Dispatch from Lieutenant Bigge", Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (J.A.S.B.), 1841, Vol.X, pp.129-136.

11. M. Radhakrishna, "Colonialism, Evolutionism & Anthropology," Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, 1997. p.45.

Evolutionism in Situating the "Tribe"

Several of the ideas behind the process of representation of the "tribe" in the different discourses of the period had developed in close interaction with contemporary intellectual currents in both Europe and America, many of which successfully justified and rationalised the perpetuation of colonialism in Britain and within the colony. In an age torn by controversy over the benefits of colonial rule, the search for some popular explanation to account for the fact of imperialism was to inevitably lead to a theory which endowed colonialism with a civilizing mission and necessarily identified the colonised as ones in need of both material and spiritual progress. The popularity of the theory of Social Darwinism and the elaborate constructs that were woven around it in the late nineteenth century have therefore to be seen in the light of this crisis in British colonialism. An influential school of thought in British society and politics, this theory argued that cultures could be ranged hierarchically in an evolutionist sequence and thereby offered an important theoretical guideline in defense of expansionism for imperialists, by justifying the political conquest of "weaker" races. Closer home, Social Darwinism shared an affinity with the doctrine of laissez fairre and found strong intellectual resonance in the ideas of Herbert Spencer who advocated this doctrine as a key to social problems of welfare and the state's role within Britain.

The defense of colonialism was thus directly linked to the location of the colonised in a spatial and temporal scale of forms in which the western man emerged as the perfect embodiment of mankind. In the ethnographic,

administrative and missionary discourses of the period, it was not merely the "difference" between the coloniser and the colonised that was reinforced but also the inferiority of the former. In this hierarchised social arrangement, the "tribe" was necessarily identified as the "lowest point in a comparative taxonomy of which European civilization represented the summit."[12] In their promise "to reveal the darkness in which the primitive walked,"[13] anthropological writings proved to be central to the process which constructed the category of the Indian " tribe" in defense of the civilizing mission of Britain. In their ethnographic accounts, colonial officials enumerated their endeavours to put an end to all "barbarous rites and superstitions which, like icebergs, have at last floated into the warmer sea of civilisation."[14]

The evolutionary theory, as it developed in the discourses on the Indian "tribe," grew into a complex system of ideas and formed a canopy, as it were, which accommodated, among others, notions of race, difference and cultural evolution."Tribes" were located at the bottom of the social system," skilled in the ruder arts of life and living in the lower stages of culture."[15] Writing on Gond customs in the late nineteenth century, Captain J. Forsyth was to remark that there was little in these customs to distinguish these tribes from other races of savages,[16] while the Ethnological Committee that was set up under the

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12. A. Skaria, op.cit, 1997, p.728.
13. M. Radhakrishna, op.cit, 1997, p.38.
14. W.W. Hunter, The Annals of Rural Bengal, 1881, pp.1-2.
15. W. Crooke, The Native Races of The British Empire, 1907, p.79.
16. J. Forsyth, Highlands of Central India, 1871, p.126.

chairmanship of A.C. Syall, as early as 1866, characterised the tribes as "waifs" and "relics" of civilization, "to be examined in exclusion to all other races and castes."[17] The Committee proposed an exhibition or an Ethnological Congress which would attempt to bring together typical examples of the races of the 'Old World,' the term "Old World" juxtaposing an extant, backward and dying society with a virile, forward looking one. This was reminiscent of the earlier concept of the civilized races being "active" and the others as "passive" or Carus's division of mankind into peoples of the day, night and dawn.[18]

In the missionary constructions of the "tribe" in both the Central Provinces and the north-east, there is often a great deal of reiteration of such evolutionist notions. A late nineteenth century article in the Methodist journal, the Indian Witness, comments on the usefulness of 'secular education' in "enforcing western traditions on an otherwise degenerate society."[19] On similar lines, Stephens Hislop talks of the "little, black, simple people" with their "bestial habits."[20] There is a frequent evoking of animal imageries and the portrayal of Naga religious life as "old, primitive and savage," (and hence an ideal field for the success of the missions) in the missionary writings on the Nagas, appearing thereby to reproduce the official colonial representation of the "tribe". " These tribes", British administrators noted," "lived in circumstances

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17. C. Bates, op.cit, 1995, p.239.

18. M. Radhakrishna, op.cit., 1997, p.25.

19. The Indian Witness, Nagpur, 1894.

20. S. Hislop, "Papers relating to the Aboriginal Tribes of the Central Provinces", ed. by Richard Temple, 1866, p.212.

not very dissimilar from the conditions under which wild animals exist... drawing health and vigour from an atmosphere which is a swift, subtle and deadly poison to all other human beings."[21]

Grafted on, and strengthening, evolutionist notions, was the concept of "race" in late nineteenth century discourses. Recognised as a major element in the portrayal of colonial thought about Indian society, the theme also appeared to be universal in that it classified both the coloniser and the colonised within its taxonomies. As a construct built around the theory of Social Darwinism, the discourse on race sought to draw "the one ineluctable conclusion that the modern European was superior to any other race, and that the degree of difference between the European and other races was simultaneously a measure of the backwardness of the subject population."[22] Further, in its ability to remain fundamental to both popular and academic conceptions of political, social and cultural differences, both in Britain and in India, in the late nineteenth century and in its betrayal of its practical relevance to the colonial administration of the period, the theme of race was to emerge as a powerful concept in the process of representation of the Indian "tribe".

In the Indian context, although notions of difference between groups of people were in existence, it was in the writings of late nineteenth century colonial officials like W.W. Hunter that these ideas appear to have been clearly

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21. Correspondence between the Secretary to the Government of Bengal and the Secretary to the Government of India, 24 April 1866. Foreign Political Proceedings , Nos. 37-39, Pol.A.

22. C. Bates op.cit., 1995, p.220.

articulated in terms of race and evolution. In his The Annals of Rural Bengal,[23] Hunter conceptualised the Indian society in terms of two distinct ethnological groups : the "superior Aryan group", and the Dravidians, who had the "servile" classes, the aborigines, wild tribes and those of "mixed" racial origins as its members.[24] A living ethnological battle between these two unequal degrees of civilization, representing the highest and lowest types of mankind,"[25] was a central idea in Hunter's portrayal of the Indian social order - the incoming Aryans who came of a "conquering stock" and were "imbued with that high sense of nationality which burns in the hearts of a people who believe themselves the depositary of a divine revelation",[26] were pitted in an invisible war against 'savagery' and 'corrupting' ethnic stocks. The effects of the evolutionist race theory in Hunter's works were visible also in the list of ethnical distinctions that he drew up between the Aryans and the aborigines and in his emphasis on an "Aryan" racial bond between Europeans or Britons and some sections of Indians. In his mission of a "redemptive racial regeneration on their behalf,"[27] Hunter believed that India's Aryans were still of a noble stock like their British colonial rulers and could overcome the fragmentation perpetuated by racial distinctions to assert their nationhood.

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23. W.W. Hunter, The Annals of Rural Bengal, 1881.

24. Ibid., p.64.

25. Ibid., p.53.

26. Ibid., p.140.

27. Ibid., W.W. Hunter, op.cit., 1881, p.139.

W.W. Hunter's racial construction of the Indian "tribe" was drawing, in several ways, from preceding writings on the "tribe". The basis of H.M. Elliot's taxonomy of social groups in India, for instance, was distinctly racial, as were the explicit equations of European and Asian racial history in the analogy between tribal 'Celts' and marginalised Dravidians.[28] Similarly, for T.H. Huxley, the firm propounder of Darwinism, it was not a homogeneous, single, Hindu race but the conflicts, migrations and inbreeding between two zones of separate culture, language and racial type, that was characteristic of India.[29] Endowed with definitive characteristics, the "tribe" was being gradually constructed as the conceptual opposite of the caste order, with the evolutionary space occupied by it being defined by the intersection of several characteristics and hierarchies. Of these, the codification and standardisation of physical traits was to become the most pervasive from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, in the determining of racial differences.

In the writings of Hunter, Dalton, Forsyth and early ethnographers among the Nagas, however, it was not so much the genetically determined physical traits as the constant, unchanging physical environment, that was used to determine these differences. The "sturdy and independent nature" of the Angami Nagas were "qualities moulded in the rugged fastness and difficult mountainous terrain of the Naga Hills,"[30] while the hot, tropical climate of the

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28. H.M. Elliot, Memoirs of the History, Folklore and Distribution of The Races of the North Western Provinces of India, 1844, p.93.

29. C. Bates, op.cit, 1995, p.189.

30. File No. 79-80, Pol.A. 24 January 1842, Foreign Political Proceedings.

Central Provinces created an indolent and lazy Gond race and also accounted for their possession of poor mental faculties.[31] The unchanging environment thus explained the "unchangeable mental characteristics of the savages,"[32] as also their incapability of exploiting the natural environment through scientific means.

These perceptions of the Indian "tribe" often found echoes in the ideas of contemporary thinkers in Britain. Thus, H.T. Buckle located the differences between races in what he termed as "the general aspects of nature," and attributed the development of products of imagination (like fine arts) in countries like India to the tropical environment around.[33] "In the civilization exterior to Europe, all nature conspired to increase the authority of the imaginative faculties and weaken the authority of the reasoning ones."[34] Thus, the imperialist explorer and coloniser necessarily belonged to the cold temperate climate and through the process of strenous conflicts with it, were endowed with the qualities of "boldness," "courage" and "scientific acumen." Intensifying and rationalising the project of colonialism, these theories also successfully entrenched the "tribe" in the lowest rung of the evolutionary ladder and stalled any possible transformation by imbuing it with immutable and fixed characteristics which were located within an equally constant physical environment.

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31. J. Forsyth, op.cit, 1871, p.115.

32. File No.101-106, 19 July 1841, F.C. Foreign Political Proceedings.

33. H.T. Buckle, The History of Civilisation in England, London 1858, p.99.

34. Ibid., p.99.

The Anthropometric Intervention

It is difficult to determine the exact point from which genetically determined physical traits took over from the physical environment or climate as the determinant of racial differences. Suffice to say that there were growing attempts to measure and codify differences in terms of physical traits from the mid nineteenth century onwards, rather than in terms of religious or anecdotal ones. Charles Grants'Gazeteer of the Central Provinces relied little on anthropometric findings for its racial speculations on the "tribes" of the region even as late as in 1871, but the evidence of the beginnings of the use of anthropometric methods in the study of tribes and castes can be traced back to an earlier date. As early as in 1851, an exhibition held in London displayed a number of "live specimens" of Indian subjects. In 1866, a circular issued by the Asiatic Society of Bengal proposed that an "ethnological exhibition," to examine the aboriginal tribes of India, be held.[35] The circular suggested that the exhibits be classified according to races and tribes and "should sit each in his own stall, should receive and converse with the public and submit to be photographed, painted, taken off in casts and otherwise reasonably dealt with in the interests of science."[36] Although such an exhibition was not held, these attempts were reflective of what was to become the dominant museological mode of looking at India, exemplified, among other things, in the census operations of the colonial administration. Writing on the process of objectification of the colonised society

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35. Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, April, 1866 quoted in Preface, E.T. Dalton, The Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, 1872.

36. Ibid.

through these operations, Bernard Cohn noted: " The history of the Indian census must be seen in the total context of the efforts of the British colonial government to collect systematic information about many aspects of Indian society and economy....(there) have been hundreds of situations that Indians over the past two hundred years have experienced...,in which their rights to property, their social relations, their rituals, were called into question or had to be explained".[37] This museological mode was based on the belief that each person embodied his or her racial and cultural identity and that the social order could be visualised as a structured grid.

These early attempts in different discourses to quantify and codify the subject populace in the interests of the colonial state however, often met with contesting ideas, often from within the colonial ethnographic writings themselves. Propounding the possibility of egalitarian conclusions about the ethnic mixing of the Indian population and denying the existence of racial groupings, were the writings of administrators like Denzil Ibbetson. Writing at the same time as W.W.Hunter, Ibbetson rejected the former's preoccupation with race as the paramount "ethnographic fact" of Indian society. Thus, while accepting the supposed distinction between the "Aryans" and the "non-Aryans" in India, he dismissed most of the premises of racial ethnology and seldom used the term "race" in its evolutionary or biological sense.[38] Instead, in his Punjab

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37. B.S.Cohn, An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays, Delhi, 1990, p.230.

38. Susan Bayly, " Caste and Race in the Colonial Ethnography of India" in Peter Robb (ed) The Concept of Race in South Asia, Delhi,1995, p.205.

Castes,[39] Ibbetson traced the origins of castes to tribal formations and offered an occupational and functional categorisation of castes and tribes in the census of 1881, dispelling notions of a uniform colonial consensus on "castes" and "tribes." In a similar vein, and drawing from the ideas of Ibbetson, J.C. Nesfield wrote : "The bond of sympathy which first drew together the... tribal fragments, of which caste is composed was... the community of function."[40] Although much admired in academic anthropological circles, both these views "offended Victorian common sense"[41] and conflicted with the racist ideas about Indian society that had by then been largely confirmed in the minds of anthropologist - administrators and missionaries through decades of anecdotal writings.

Herbert Hope Risley's ideas and writings, which successfully applied the "scientific" technique of anthropometry to propound his theory of the social origins of "tribes" and castes, therefore assumes a great deal of significance in this context. Highly critical of the ideas of both Ibbetson and Nesfield, Risley proceeded to divide the Aryan and Dravidians into two distinct ethnic aggregates in a society that he perceived as broken up into mutually exclusive groups,[42] each with its clear social affinities. While such ideas can also be located in the works of several other colonial enthnographers like Hunter and Dalton, for

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39. Denzil Ibbetson, Punjab Castes: Races, Castes and Tribes of the People of Punjab, 1916.

40. As quoted in H.H. Risley's Tribes and Castes of Bengal, 1891, p.32.

41. C. Bates, op.cit., 1995, p.231.

42. H.H. Risley, op.cit., 1891, p.31.

instance, what transformed Risley's ideas into a conceptual break in the history of the idea of the 'tribe' was his focus on physical criteria for identifying races and his use of anthropometric techniques.Dismissive of culture and language as social indicators, which he termed as "unsatisfactory explanations", Risley identified physical characters as "the best tests of real affinity"[43].

The method of anthropometry, which relied on evidence that was termed as 'indexical,' i.e. physical traces of the objects under study, and found in the statistics transcribed from the outer physical forms of Indians, an effacement of all subjectivity and unreliability, was therefore suited for the purposes of determining races. Using anthropometric data which consisted of measurements of skin colour, skull size, nasal indices and over all stature, Risley constructed an "uniform tribal type",[44] that was grounded in what appeared to be immutable and permanent differences with the caste order. Most of this "type" was described as being of Dravidian and Mongolian stock, as distinct from the agricultural or peasant classes of north India who were dominantly of Aryan origin. The transformation of "tribes" into "Hindus" meant an abandoning of their primitive usages while the social element remained untouched. Basing his notions of evolutionary racism on the simple act of anthropometrical measurement which traced even the minutest social distinction to some difference in physiognomy, skin colour or bone structure, Risley was to assert: "If we take a series of castes in Bengal, Bihar and the United Provinces or Madras, so that the caste with the finest nose shall be at the top and that with the

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43. Ibid., p.30

44. H.H.Risley, Tribes and Castes, 1891 p.31.

coarsest nose at the bottom... it will be found that this order corresponds substantially to the accepted order of social precedence".[45]

Risley's writings, which were published in the last decades of the nineteenth century, were in several ways reflective of a much broader and complex process which successfully used culture, religion, language, physiognomy and other aspects of tribal life as symbols for the social construction of the "tribe". That the representation of the "tribe", which in itself was enmeshed in "enduring and changing power inequalities",[46] was largely driven by the political expediency of the colonial state, lent greater significance to the use of evolutionist and social theories in the process. The identification of some of the images of the "tribe" that were portrayed during this period in the colonial official, ethnographic and missionary discourses should take into account the attempt at "essentialising" a community in the specific interests of the colonial order.

Essentialisation of the "Tribe"

Colonialism being necessarily founded on the notion of "difference" between the coloniser and the colonised, the representation of the latter was necessarily embedded in a relationship of dominance, which often deprived them of the power to represent themselves.[47] In the Indian context however, portrayal of the "tribe" as "primitive" and as located in a spatial and temporal order that

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45. H.H. Risley, People of India, 1919, p.29.

46. J.Clifford and George Marcus, (ed) Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, London, 1986, Introduction.

47. R.Inden, "Orientalist Constructions of India", Modern Asian Studies 20,3,1986, p.44.

was "different" from the larger colonised Hindu social order, reveals an interesting dimension of the discourse on the politics of representation of the colonised. Appropriately termed as "shades of wildness" by Ajay Skaria, this aspect of representation "located the tribes in the present only to separate them by time and place them in the past... repositioning them as survivals from a past that had been outgrown by the modern".[48] As the "vestiges" of civilizations, "tribes" were a structurally opposed category of the caste order and the race sentiment, which structuralised this difference, "far from being a figment of intolerant pride of the Brahmans, rested upon a foundation of facts which scientific methods confirm..."[49].

In their depiction of the protracted historical conflict between Aryans and the aborigines (which also potentially marked out the colonised area as a "tabula rasa" that could be settled on by succeeding waves of colonisers), both the colonial ethnographic and missionary writings relied heavily on what can be termed as the Brahmanical sources: The Vedas and the Epics. In what appears to have been a curious blending of the Hindu religious texts with the theory of Social Darwinism, passages from these texts were frequently drawn upon to authorise the representation of the "tribes". Thus while Charles Grant lamented on the difficulties of constructing a "connected narrative of the Gonds from the mass of Brahmanical fiction" ,[50] others found enough evidence in the "sacred, traditional accounts" to represent the tribes as" savages allied to apes".[51]

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48. A.Skaria, op.cit., 1997, p.728.

49. H.H. Risley, Tribes and Castes 1891, p.(i).

50. C.Grant, Gazeteer of The Central Provinces, 1870, Introduction.

51. James Samuelson, India: Past and Present, 1890.p.90.

These traditional accounts were also often used to bring the narrative on "tribes" to the present. Thus, "a comparison of the accounts that are given of Dasyus in the Vedas with the Indian aborigines of today shows conclusively that... they were a more debased type of beings than what are now called mankind."[52] Such representations functioned to detract the importance of the "tribes" as politically active people and strengthened oppositions between the civilized, who were seen as necessarily active and forward looking and the "stagnant, passive, tribes". In the colonial official and enthnographic writings on the Nagas, for instance, there is a negation of the existence of any kind of an organised polity among the Naga tribes and a reduction of their way of life to "one of total anarchy.... marked by an absence of all law".[53]

An interesting offshoot of this "brahmanising of Darwinian concepts"[54] was the construction of the "criminal type" among the "tribes" in these discourses. Thus Hunter's classification of the "non-Aryans" into potential criminals was based on Vedic sources. The identifying of certain communities as "vagrant and criminal tribes... characterised by a disreputed way of life"[55] reflected the tendency to regard criminality as an attribute of a genetic urge and therefore as racial and hereditary.[56] The notion of "criminal tribes" was often

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52. J.Samuelson, op.cit., 1890, p.94.

53. File No: 15-22, 29 May 1847, F.C. Foreign Political Proceedings.

54. M. Radhakrishna, op.cit., 1997, p.83.

55. W. Crooke, The Native Races, 1907, Chapter-IV.

56. S.Nigam, "Disciplining and Policing the 'criminals by birth', Part I: The making of a colonial stereotype", Indian Economic and Social History Review, 27, 2, (1990).

sought to be strengthened by a strong use of the imagery of animals in the writings of the period. It was common to comment on the "bestial habits"[57] of Central Indian tribes or to refer to Gond women as "liker monkeys than human beings."[58] Debates between colonial officials on the policy to be adopted towards the Naga Hills, reflect a similar if not more explicit image of its inhabitants. Thus, "a scheme was needed which would be similar to one for extermination of wild beasts... (for) the circumstances under which the Nagas live are not very dissimilar from the conditions under which wild animals exist... the savage can do whatever the wild animal does; he makes his lair where the wild animal makes his."[59]

In the specific context of the Naga Hills, where, unlike the Central Provinces, the process of Hinduisation was virtually absent, such constructions were also necessary to reinforce the image of the Naga as physically and culturally insolated from the "civilized" Brahmaputra valley below. There is often an explicit association of these tribes with forests and hills which were seen as "wild" portions of land away from the "civilization" that was associated with the plains or riparian areas.[60] The distinction between casteless mountaineers and the caste fettered tropical lowlanders was infact to become a major theme in the social classification schemes devised by late nineteenth century ethnologists.

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57. S.Hislop, op.cit., 1866, p.212.

58. J.Forsyth, op.cit., 1871, p.147.

59. File No: 37-39, 24 April, 1866, Pol.A. Foreign Political Proceedings.

60. A. Skaria, op. cit., 1997, p.731.

Such notions have often been seen as reflecting a subtle incorporation of Victorian thinking on tribes and "wildness" which associated forests with outlaws and bandits, into the discourse on Indian tribes.[61]

A corollary of such representations of the "tribes" was the link that was sought to be established between physical attributes and the mental capacity of the aborigine. Social Darwinism allowed for the scale of civilization to be determined by certain physical characteristics like the cranial index, leading to conclusions that "the brain of the civilized man was nearly 70 percent larger than that of the European".[62] Similarly, the European standard of a high bridged nose indicated the highest possible development of the mind. This relationship between the mind and the physique was extended to an understanding of tribal social and political institutions as also to notions of moral and ethical progress among the "tribes." The definition of tribal institutions and social organizations often became a part of Europeans' attempts to describe their own history and evolutionist origins. That would explain perhaps the frequent allusions to the persistence of the "primitive" type of culture among the Gonds, "uninfluenced by the surrounding Aryan culture.... skilled in the ruder arts of life and living in the lower stages of culture."[63] Like the missionaries in the Central Provinces who hoped to offer the Gonds and Baigas a social alternative to the Hindu

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61. S. Gordon, "Bhils and the idea of a criminal tribe" in Anand Yang (ed) Crime and Criminality in British India, 1985, p.132.

62. C.Darwin, The Descent of Man, 1890, London. p.190 cited in M. Radhakrishna, op.cit., 1997, p.15.

63. J.Forsyth, op.cit., 1871, p.126.

system in the absence of any religious system of their own,[64] the Christian missionaries in the north eastern part of the country too, emphatically recorded the absence of any definite ideas about religion among the Nagas, while simultaneously stressing on their intelligence and capability of receiving the religion of the missionaries.

Such portrayals assume greater significance in a period marked by a gradual spread of the proselytising activities of the American Baptist mission in the Naga Hills. What was being portrayed was the progression of mental faculities in purely evolutionist terms. Primitive man was necessarily illogical and given to magic. Modern man however, had invented science. The colonial ethnographers and missionaries, like most of their reflective contemporaries, believed their own age to be one of transition and assumed that modern society had developed from its antithesis.[65]

The links between the scale of civilization and moral and ethical progress were also explored and greater morality enshrined in the upper layers of the civilizational order. The focus, therefore, was on the "barbaric practices" of uncivilized societies, on cannibalism, infanticide and human sacrifices and frequently on the disgusting nudity[66] of the "tribes", all of which served to justify the presence of colonialism in the country and defend its persistence before a British public which was getting increasingly critical about colonial policies.

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64. Central Provinces Methodist Church Conference Proceedings, 1910, p.21.

65. A. Kuper, Invention of Primitive Society, 1988, p.5.

66. File No: 79-80 12 April 1841 F.C., Foreign Political Proceedings.

The language of the "tribes" was another powerful symbol of social construction as is evident from the widespread attention that it received in the writings of the period. The use of evolutionist categories was evident in the argument that connected language not just to the reasoning faculty but to the anatomical structures of the vocal organs. The inability of the Europeans to pronounce some of the "strong sounds" of groups like the Bushmen was seen as reflective of fundamental differences in the larynx. Risley thus believed that basic linguistic divisions of the Indian subcontinent could be traced back to racial origins and wrote: "The gobbling speech of the people of Chittagong and Eastern Bengal, and their inability to negotiate certain consonants seems to suggest that.... their vocal apparatus must differ materially from that of their western neighbours".[67] The absence or presence of literacy and of a written script was also often seen as indicative of the progress of a society and of its relationship with modernity. Thus, communities that were eventually classified as "primitives" often did not possess written scripts and "like all savages, had a childish vagueness about their conceptions... for in the aboriginal tongue there seemed to be no expression for abstract ideas.[68] Similarly for the American Baptist missionaries among the Naga and Garo hills, assessing the feasibility of "creating" written scripts for different tribes remained an important preoccupation and the difficulties posed therein were often cause enough to suspend mission work several times.[69]

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67. H.H. Risley, Tribes and Castes 1891, p.9.

68. J.Forsyth, op.cit., 1871, p.118.

69. Letter of Rev. Nathan Brown, June 15, 1850, cited in H.K. Barpujari American Missionaries, 1986, p.252.

An image that appeared to counter the dominant construction of the "tribe" in the period and writings under discussion, was of the "pure" and "untouched" tribal, with qualities of honesty, loyalty, truthfulness and independence ascribed to it. In the writings of mid nineteenth century ethnographers, travellers and missionaries like Dalton, Forsyth and Hislop, there is often a "celebration of wildness", as it were, which sought to dwell on the "naturalness and freedom" of tribes living in remote and rugged surroundings.[70] Drawing from the Romanticist and Naturalist traditions, Stephens Hislop, for instance, described the Gonds as "shy, simple and timid people.... living in a harmonious relationship with their natural environment".[71]

Doubtless, to a great extent these representations of the Indian "tribe" drew from the old Enlightenment tradition of western thought about the Noble Savage. With its implications of egalitarianism, the idea of the Noble Savage had become a part of the attack on the European social system of privilege, inherited power and political oppression.[72] For those who perceived of a fall of western society from a previous state of perfection, the idea of the Noble Savage had thus come to represent a desirable anti type to social existence and was also the reason behind "the celebration of wildness" in some of the writings of this period. In this "celebration", there was a catering to the sense of the exotic, of the unspoilt, untouched way of tribal life, far removed from the squalor, poverty and misery that had come to be associated with modern civilization. The image

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70. File No: 154-159, August 1871, Political 'A' Foreign Political Proceedings.

71. S.Hislop, op. cit. 1866,p.VI.

72. A. Skaria, op.cit. 1997, p.733.

of a changeless, pristine social order, thus, apart from providing the potent justification for continued colonial presence in India, was also symbolic of the attempts of an industrial society to escape from itself.

By the end of the eighteenth century, however, there was a growing European demand for more dispassionate, scientific investigation, for more detailed and impartial observations and also for a justification and encouragement of the process of British expansion overseas. These demands tended to be grounded in increasingly confident assumptions of European intellectual, moral and practical superiority.[73] The already existent and apparently insurmountable differences between the Noble Savage and the Englishman were now tinged with paternalistic notions. Educated Englishmen by the end of that century had possibly come to believe that "the workings of non-European societies was comprehensible to them and what was being revealed were societies inferior to their own and capable of being changed for the better by outside intervention".[74] Such attitudes endowed the colonial state with paternalistic qualities and continued to locate the primitives within the evolutionist framework. In the perception of colonial officials, missionaries and ethnographers of the nineteenth century, therefore, the Gonds, the Bhils and the Nagas were all "backward", "childlike" and "noble" and hence objects of paternalistic protection. Paternalism was also the sub-text of the establishment of

73. P.J Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, The Great Map of Mankind, London, 1982, p.300.

74. P.J.Marshall and Williams, op.cit. 1982, p.300.

colonial superiority over "tribes" like the Nagas, for instance, where resistance to the superior British forces was seen to be the result of their "excessive ignorance of the fact that such opposition was hopeless".[75] Such barbariously ignorant yet independent and a fine energetic race of men had therefore to be dealt with mildly, eventually leading them to civilization.[76] This civilizing mission primarily involved subordinating the "tribes", making them take to settled cultivation while keeping them apart from castes.[77]

The discourse on the India "tribe" in the late nineteenth century has to be hence located within the broader politics of representation that characterised the colonial period, in which concepts of race and evolution were used quite instrumentally, often to sustain imperial domination. This representation was but a part of a broader process in which the exigencies of colonial transformation and prevelant European ideas provided British rule with the frames of reference for the categorisation of the native population of India. In this process, alternative approaches to the construction of the category of the "tribe" in terms

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75. File No: 79-118, March, 1872, 'Pol.A. Foreign Political Proceedings.

76. File No: 401-403, August 1875, Pol.A, Foreign Political Proceedings.

77. The idea of the Noble Savage has also been explained by situating it within the sphere of gender ideologies argued to have been used by the colonial state in the representation of the colonised. Ajay Skaria, (op.cit.1997) for instance, sees the attribution of qualities of loyalty, independence and honesty as part of a broader colonial attempt to attribute masculinity to the "tribes" as opposed to the feminisation of the castes. And yet, while its shared gender ascriptions with the British gave the "tribe" more in common with the colonisers than with the castes, its primitiveness and the absence of certain singular qualities prevented it from becoming the equals of the British. Instead, the Bhil or the Gond needed British paternalistic protection because "simple, straightforward men like the wild tribes" made ideal subjects and affirmed British imperial masculinity and nobility.

of occupationalism and functionalism, were successfully marginalised and an almost hegemonic discourse of social evolutionism and racism constructed. The identification of "tribes" as different from castes and from the colonising European and more significantly, the naturalisation of these differences, thereby ascribing immutable and fixed qualities to the "otherness" of the "tribe", created social hierarchies which remained extreme and definitively racial.

CHAPTER - II

The first half of the twentieth century leading upto the transfer of power forms an interesting period in the history of the idea of the Indian "tribe", when several anthropologists, sociologists, colonial officials and nationalist leaders, struggled to define and redefine the term in the context of new political developments. The earlier chapter had analysed the representation of the term in late nineteenth century colonial official, ethnographic and missionary writings. This chapter picks up the trajectory from the earlier chapter and attempts to explore the continuity or abandoning of the themes of race and evolution in the categorisation of the "tribe". It examines them in the context of the growth of new discourses and their claims to alternate conceptualisations of the Indian "tribe".

What adds an interesting dimension to the study of the idea of the "tribe" in the writings of the first half of the twentieth century is the presence of two apparently irreconciliable camps and the lively debates that they generated around issues relating to the Indian "tribe". Triggered off by the Government of India Act 1935, which contained two provisions whereby certain tracts with predominantly tribal populations were to be known as "Excluded" and "Partially Excluded" areas, these debates appeared to be centered around issues of immediate political interest relating to the exclusion of these areas from the normal purview of the elected Provincial Legislatures and placing them under the direct charge of the Governor. On a related and perhaps more conceptual plane, however, they raised questions that were to have a significant bearing on

the idea of the Indian "tribe": What was the appropriate definition of the "tribe"? Where was it to be located in relation to the larger society, state and nation? How does one understand what was commonly termed as the "tribal way of life"? This chapter studies the attempts of the various discourses of this period to address these questions and the images of the Indian "tribe" that were constructed in the process.

Contesting Representations

Prior to the passing of the Government of India Act 1935, such questions relating to the concept of the Indian "tribe" were confined primarily to the colonial official, ethnographic, missionary and some scattered travel writings. A study of the representation of the "tribe" in the writings of the second half of the nineteenth century is marked, therefore, by the absence of what was to be later termed as the nationalist discourse on tribes. This absence is evident also in the writings of the first half of the twentieth century leading up to 1935, with the All India Congress Committee records, representative of the official nationalist archive, containing no more than a fleeting reference or two to tribals, although the problems of women, lower castes and communal harmony are covered in depth.[1] With its explicit objectives of "insulating" several tribal communities from the control of Indian legislatures and ministries and thereby raising a storm in nationalist circles, the Act of 1935 succeeded in bringing the predicament of

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1. Ramachandra Guha, "Savaging The Civilised: Verrier Elwin and the Tribal Question in Late Colonial India" Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.31, 1996, p.2376.

a long ignored people to the centre stage.[2] In the process, it also succeeded in creating the conditions which led to an articulation of perceptions of the "tribe" that were apparently opposed to and different from, those of the late nineteenth century writings discussed in the previous chapter.

In the first half of the twentieth century, what was commonly seen as the "nationalist" representation of the Indian "tribe" tended to be constituted primarily of the writings of important Congress leaders and social workers, anthropologists and sociologists who subscribed, often openly, to nationalist ideals and objectives. The categorisation of the "tribe" in these writings was marked by the strength of their attack on the "isolationists", a term that came to be broadly associated with particular British "anthropologist-administrators"[3] of the period. Condemning the Act as "an attempt to entirely segregate the tribes from the rest of their brethren",[4] the Congress launched a critique of the isolationist perception which viewed Indians as "incapable and (who) shall for ever remain incapable, of looking after the interests of the backward people of their country (while) a foreigner coming from 7,000 miles has got an inherent capacity to look after the interests of these men."[5] The Faizpur resolution of 1936 clearly articulated the Congress perception of the Act as an attempt to

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2. Ibid p.2376.

3. Nandini Sundar, Subalterns and Sovereigns: An Anthropological History of Bastar 1854-1996, Delhi 1997 p.157.

4. M.S. Aney, leader of The Central Provinces, regarding the resolution to extend the same level of administration to the people of the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas, 17 February to 27 February 1936, Legislative Assembly Debates.

5. Ibid.

create inroads into the national struggle by excluding the adivasis from it, and read thus: "This Congress is of the opinion that the creation of Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas... is yet another attempt to divide the people of India into different groups with unjustifiable and discriminatory treatment and to obstruct the growth of uniform democratic institutions in the country".[6]

The isolationist tradition against which the nationalist discourse was directed, apart from primarily reflecting the views of anthropologist administrators of the Central Provinces, Bastar and the Naga Hills, like W.V. Grigson, E.S. Hyde, J.H. Hutton and J.P. Hills, was also a part of a broader colonial discourse on the Indian "tribe". For the purpose of understanding the isolationist perception of the "tribe", it is essential, therefore, to identify the several other strands of thought that this perception drew upon or defined itself against. Chief among the former was the support extended to the clauses of the Act of 1935 by the Conservative MP's in the House of Commons. Of the several grounds on which the exclusion policy was sought to be defended in the House of Commons during the 1934-35 session, the arguments which emphasised on the difficulties of governing these "backward tribes" and reposed trust on the colonial mode of governance, were undoubtedly the strongest. Several of the lengthy speeches in the House dwelt on the superior stature of tribal morality in comparison to the civilized order, on their vulnerability to the surrounding Hindu caste order and hence, on the need to "withdraw them from

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6. Resolutions passed by the 50th session of the Indian National Congress, Faizpur, December 1936.

ordinary Parliamentary institutions,"[7] and place them instead under a beneficial British government, with strong parallels being drawn with the African situation. For Winston Churchill, who professed a strong interest in "the affairs of the primitive tribes" and for the other members of the British Parliament, the Indian aboriginal, therefore, was defined by his "differences" with both the Hindu caste order and with the western civilizational values to which it was being recently exposed. In essence "backward and primitive"[8] and located in the lowest rung of the civilizational ladder, the Indian "tribe" was the natural recipient of the benefits of contact with a higher civilizational order that the colonial state represented.

Several European members who argued in favour of the Act in the Legislative Assembly debates of 1936 in India, appeared to similarly subscribe to this perception of the Indian "tribals" as "a generally moral people who know nothing of the worries of the outside world" and believed that "it was impossible that intelligent views and opinions could be formulated by primitive and savage tribes."[9] There were differences between the isolationists and mainstream British administrators, but these were confined primarily to the nature of policies to be adopted, with the latter being keen on the extention of administration while the former continued to argue for the isolation of" tribes" from the corrosive

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7. Sir S. Hoare in the House of Commons Session, March 22, 1935.

8. Winston Churchill in the House of Commons Session, May 15, 1935.

9. C.H. Witherington in the Legislative Assembly Debates, 17 February to 27 February, 1936.

influences of mainstream India.[10] Thus John Butler, the then Under Secretary of State for India, was to argue: "It would be disastrous at this stage to take any step which could alienate the public opinion of what may be called the advanced communities in India whom we wish to interest in the welfare of these backward areas.... If at this moment, we decide on a ring-fence policy and segregate... many areas, we put off to a later date, the chance of assimilation."[11] What remained unaltered in these various perceptions, was the image of the Indian aboriginal, the essential distinction made between the "wild" and the "civilized" by most British officials and the unquestioned acceptance of the necessity of colonialism on the part of both the isolationists, and the administrators who differed with them.

The nationalist critique of the isolationist representation of the "tribe" on the other hand, was rooted in a comprehensive critique of the process of colonisation and a location of the tribes within their understanding of this process. It began with a recognition of the colonial state's attempts at regulating and systematising the knowledge of the colonised through the construction of categories like "tribe" and "caste". Thus, A.V. Thakkar accused the Assam Census Superintendent of having pooled "all the tribals of Hindu and Christian religion into one cauldron of "tribals," which he dared to call one community, in an unscientific way, because he wished them to form one community, like Muslims or Christians".[12] The identification of the Census as a means of

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10. N. Sundar, op.cit 1997, p.159.

11. J. Butler in the House of Commons Session, May 13, 1935.

12. A.V. Thakkar, "Census of Assam Tribals", Man in India, Vol.12, 1941.

creating "essential and retrievable categories",[13] out of the colonised, for meeting the political exigencies of the colonial state was, in several ways, a shift away from the preceding nineteenth century writings, in which the representation of the "tribe" and the interests of the colonial administration were often overlapping processes.[14] Nationalists argued that the "tribal problem" was of British making and that legislation would formalise differences between the so-called autochtonous and non-autochtonous groups, aiding in the British attempts at divide and rule. The Act of 1935 was viewed, similarly, as leading to a further institutionalisation of the two Indias -- one composed of "castes' and the other of "tribes". Addressing a conference of political workers at Midnapore, Gandhi was to remark, "Then there were the Adivasis. The 1935 Act has separated them from the rest of the inhabitants of India... divided them into water-tight compartments and... classified them as tribal races. It was a shame that they should be isolated from the nation of which they were an inalienable part."[15]

The debates within the discourse on the Indian "tribe" were therefore, often complicated by the surcharged political atmosphere in which intentions and actions acquired meanings beyond their immediate context. For the nationalists

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13. Vincente Raphael, "White Love: Census and Melodrama in the United State's Colonisation of the Philipines", History and Anthropology, 1994, p.269.

14. As discussed in the previous chapter, the categorisation of the Indian "tribe"in various writings of the late nineteenth century often effectively rendered the colonised more visible by classifying them into structured grids, a process which helped the colonial administration.

15. Speech at Political Workers Conference, January 4, 1946, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, volume 82, 1972, p.411.

and the nationalist minded scholars, the criticism of the process of colonisation was to acquire dimensions of considerable importance, often marginalising other forces of change in tribal life.In a shift from not merely the writings of the late nineteenth century but from the views of the early Indian anthropologists as well, the works of anthropologists/sociologists of the late colonial period were characterised by a strong awareness of the forms and nature of colonial exploitation on the "tribes".Thus, unlike the pioneer Indian anthropologist of the first decades of the twentieth century, Sarat Chandra Roy, who appeared to be too great an enthusiast for a " more sympathetic British government... ever solicitous for the tribal's welfare,"[16] to form any critical conclusions about colonial rule, most Indian writings of this period identified colonialism as having brought about a " revolution in the nature and extent of contact with the aborigines" and hence as a key factor behind the erosion of tribal solidarity.

Defects of the colonial administration thus, figured prominently in the list of factors drawn up by the Gandhian social worker, A.V.Thakkar, to explain certain problems in tribal social and economic life. Thakkar viewed the administrative policy of the colonial state as " highly authoritarian and autocratic" and criticised its slow meting out of justice.[17] In the works of G.S.Ghurye, this critique of colonialism and the position of the "tribe" in relation to it, was clearly and forcefully articulated.In his scholarly work, The

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16. S.C.Roy,The Oraons of Chotanagpur : Their History, Economic Life and Social Organisation, 1915, p.49.

17. A.V.Thakkar,The Problem of the Aborigines in India, R.R.Kale Memorial Lecture, Poona, 1941, p.367

Aborigines so-called and their future.[18] Ghurye developed a systematic argument which identified British imperial rule as "the structural cause of tribal discontent".[19] Although accepting that contact with the surrounding Hindu culture led to an increasing pressure for change in tribal life,the force of Ghurye's rhetoric was directed against the changes engineered by the colonial state.Criticising the British system of law, in particular "the stringent forest laws" as "unsuited for the Indian aborigine"[20] Ghurye included the land revenue system, the creation of a land market,and an exploitative excise policy within the conditions which contributed towards the impoverishment of the tribals and rendered their contact with the Hindu moneylenders, land holders and liquor dealers more rapid and intensive.

Ghurye was a nationalist minded scholar, arguing from what was then a synonym for the nationalist position --- the " assimilationist" or the "interventionist" one. Opposed to the isolationist position, which accepted the necessity of colonialism, the assimilationist identification with the ideals of the Congress led movement was evident in their representation of the Indian "tribe". As discussed earlier, this included the recognition of the "tribe" as a colonial construct and a subsequent critique of the effects of colonial rule on tribal life. Unlike isolationism , which its opponents described as a standpoint which sought to " keep the aborigines in their areas untouched by the civilization of the

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18. Published in 1943.

19. R.Guha, op.cit. 1996, p.2385.

20. G.S.Ghurye , The Aborigines so-called and their future,Poona, 1941, p.195.

plains", assimilationism, it was argued, "allowed aborigines to form a part of the civilized communities of (the) country".[21]

The notions of cultural commonality, of pluralistic syncretism and of a homogenous nationalism that was reflected in the assimilationist idea of the "tribe" were however, to be effectively questioned and contested by a section of Indian writings on the "tribe". Prominent among them were the works of S.C.Roy and D.N.Majumdar, both of whose ethnographic accounts of Indian tribes could be listed among the earliest writings by Indian anthropologists.

In their conceptualisation of the "tribe" and in their location of it within the processes of social history, the representatives of the nationalist tradition drew regularly from the writings of these early Indian anthropologists, in particular from the works of S.C.Roy, whose earliest works dated to the second decade of the twentieth century. Ghurye's writings described Roy as the first Indian anthropologist of note and went on to say : " The late Rai Bahadur S.C.Roy was evidently an assimilationist. He pointed out the good that was done to the so-called aborigines by their contact with the Hindus in spite of the bad effects it produced and hoped for a brighter future for them in the assimilative process".[22] On similar lines, A.V.Thakkar quoted from Roy's works to strengthen his criticism of the colonial order. The views of another noted Indian anthropologist , D.N.Majumdar, on the process of culture contact, were seen as a denial of the isolationist perception which noted a " loss of alertness and vitality" in tribes which had come within the assimilative process. When seen

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21. A.V.Thakkar, The Problem of Aborigines in India, Poona, 1941, p.372.

22. G.S.Ghurye, op.cit., 1943, p.159.

from the perspective of the nationalists, it appears difficult, not to situate those early Indian anthropological writings within this assimilative tradition and draw parallels with its representation of the "tribe". Hence, an analysis of these writings is interesting on account of their differences with the nationalist perception and their construction of an often distinctly alternate image of the "tribe".

The early decades of the twentieth century which saw the growth of Indian anthropology was also a period when anthropology in Europe and the Americas was being increasingly defined by a period of field-work in small-scale societies. In what was possibly an attempt of an emerging academic discipline to distance itself from studies of direct administrative utility, the discipline of anthropology came to be characterised by a focus on tribal societies which were studied through the practice of field-work -- a circumscribed period of interaction with another culture for the sole purpose of investigating its social and cultural construction.[23] The effect of such trends is obvious in the writings on the Indian "tribe" during this period, when anthropologists like Roy and Majumdar, in the lines of A.C.Haddon and W.H.R. Rivers, routinely journeyed out from a bounded cultural world to analyse "other societies". Roy recorded material on the "vanishing customs" of the Mundas and Oraons while Majumdar worked on reaching an understanding of Malinowski's functional model for understanding "savage customs". As with western anthropology, a growing professionalism was to define Indian anthropology during this period, as was

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23. C.Pinney, "Colonial Anthropology in the Laboratory of Mankind" in C.A.Bayly (ed.), An Illustrated History of Modern India 1600-1947, 1991, p.255.

reflected in Roy's repeated emphasis on "the need for methodological and intellectual rigour that could direct independent scientific research".[24] The inherently power-laden encounters between the observer and the observed and the inexplicability and unjustifiability of the ethnographer's position from the standpoint of the "other",[25] and the impossibility of obtaining "scientific", "objective", and "neutral" anthropological knowledge, are issues that could be raised here. What is also of relevance is the shift within the anthropological discourse on Indian tribes, from a tradition of colonial ethnographic and travelogue writing which was identified with the edifice of the colonial state, to one which sought to redefine the objectives of anthropology by focussing on methods and goals which appeared at least immediately removed from the projects of the colonial state.

The image of the "tribe" that emerged out of this discourse was reflective of the attempts of the Indian anthropologists to negotiate with the ideas of preceding writings . The theory of an Aryan invasion and the inevitable subjugation of dark-skinned Dravidian tribes, appears to have been subscribed to. 'Race'was therefore a central theme in early Indian anthropological writings and helped to naturalise what were presumed to be fundamental differences between tribes and castes. Thus, Roy's construction of the trajectory of Munda history locates it in a continuous process of conflict and assimilation, wherein a distinct and racially different aboriginal population was being absorbed into the

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24. S.C.Roy, "Anthropological Research in India", Man in India, 1921, vol. I

25. J.Clifford & George Marcus (ed), Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, London, 1986, p.143.

Hindu fold. Contrary to the writings of later Indian observers, most of which sought to highlight the similarities between tribes and castes, the Indian anthropological writings of this period, in particular those of S.C.Roy's, appear to have constructed a picture of the Indian aboriginal which relied heavily on racial evolutionist perceptions and viewed the "tribe" as the conceptual opposite of the Aryan Brahman. For anthropologists like Roy and Majumdar, the Indian tribe appeared to be the "other" of not merely western civilizational influences, but of the Hindu caste order as well. Thus, Majumdar commented on the "transformation of the Hos into a degenerate race of men with weak constitutions and a lower expectancy of life,"[26] on account of contact with civilization and concluded his study of the Hos with the hope that " they (the Hos) could be returned to their former state of lawlessness when they derived subsistence from the chase and the produce of the forest, supplemented by pillage and plunder".[27] Roy's arguments and efforts in support of the separation of the aboriginal tracts from Bihar and their constitution into a separate province can also be interpreted as a reflection of similar views about the relationship between the "aboriginal" and the surrounding society.[28] These appear to have been perceptions that could have contributed little to the assimilationist ideas of the 1940's. Rather, the representation of the "tribe" in these Indian anthropological writings points to the shared grounds between them and the isolationists.

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26. D.N.Majumdar, quoted in G.S.Ghurye, The Scheduled Tribes, 1963, p.143.

27. Ibid.

28. S.C.Roy argued against the idea of a " common nationalism" and suggested instead that "the aboriginal tracts from Bihar be formed into a separate province under a sympathetic administrator directly subordinate to the Governor General".

To begin with, it was almost a matter of faith for most of the anthropologist- administrators (the 'isolationists') of the period that the Indian aboriginal culture was different from what they termed as the "mainstream Hindu and Muslim culture". "It must always be insisted upon that the Aboriginal, be he called Bhumijan, Adivasi or what not, is not an untouchable and not a Harijan", asserted W.V.Grigson in his Notes on the Mandla District.[29] Such ideas were further strengthened by drawing parallels between aboriginal cultures the world over and pointing out their differences with the civilized order. Isolationists, therefore, celebrated the cultural distinctiveness of Indian "tribes" from the caste order as against the nationalist portrayal of a "single cultural universe" of tribes and Hindus.

In this celebration, the anthropologist- administrators appear to have drawn immensely from the Romanticist and the Naturalist traditions that had characterised the works of the preceding period, in particular those of J.Forsyth's and Stephen Hislop's. The focus was on the preservation of the indigeneous social and political institutions. Thus, in his Maria Gonds of Bastar[30] Grigson set out as its primary objective the "ascertaining of grievances, specially those caused by the adoption in a primitive state ... of laws... some centuries more advanced".[31] The image of the ideal "tribe" that was constructed was that of the " real wild Gonds, uncontaminated by the ideas

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29. W.V.Grigson, Aboriginal Problem in the Mandla District, Nagpur, 1940, p.48.

30. Published in 1939.

31. W.V.Grigson,The Maria Gonds of Bastar, Nagpur 1938, Preface.

of a superior civilization"[32] and hence in need of protection against forces which threatened to reduce them to "mean,cowardly and cringing beings".[33] The necessity of regulating the pace of culture contact, of ensuring that the changes were beneficial rather than detrimental, was a pre-occupation of the isolationists of the period. There also appears to have been an almost complete unanimity among the anthropologist-administrators on the need for protection of tribes by the colonial government, an idea that has often been attributed to the paternalistic notions believed to have been reflected in British attitudes towards India.

Reinforcing the emphasis on the cultural distinctiveness of the "aborigine" was the discourse on race in these writings. In the understanding of the isolationists "the contact between different populations remained confined to economic exchange and cultural adjustment..., nowhere was the tribal identity ... impaired nor the distinction between the tribe and other castes obscured...(Contact) had not led to any appreciable racial blending".[34] Race, then, continued to be a central theme in this discourse on the "tribe" most evident perhaps in the representation of the tribes of the northeastern part of the country. Defending the policy for exclusion for Assam in the Legislative Assembly, J.H.Hutton argued: "They (the Nagas) are Mongolians and although they are in India geographically, they are not of her but are attached to their own institutions and their own ideas".[35]

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32. H.C.Ward, Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Mandlah District, Bombay, 1870, p.132.

33. H.C.Ward, op.cit, 1870, p.132.

34. C.Von Furer Haimendorf,The Raj Gonds of Adilabad, 1948, p.31

35. J.H. Hutton in the Legislative Assembly Debates, 17 February - 27 February, 1936.

The Essentialisation of the "tribe": The Nationalist Discourse

The nationalist representation of the "tribe" and their portrayal of its relationship with the surrounding society, which comprised primarily of the majority Hindu community, appeared to be opposed to that of the isolationists. An important premise in the nationalist categorisation of the "tribe" was the notion of assimilationism, which was to be achieved chiefly through the incorporation of the "tribes" into the caste order. This premise, in turn,drew from a strong critique of colonialism and what were viewed as its attempts to segregate sections of the Indian populace and advanced, instead, notions of political, economic and cultural homogenity. The concept of the Varna system as the basis for a cohesive society was central to this process of homogenisation. "Indian society", argued the nationalist minded anthropologist N.K.Bose, "was made up of the union of many communities (and) the Varna system allows for several communities to come together... to build a larger society".[36]

Hindu exploitation of tribals was seen as a secondary phenomenon, enabled precisely by the primary phenomenon of British domination[37] and this cleared the way for erasing what had been portrayed as immutable and natural differences between tribes and castes in the colonial ethnographic and missionary writings. These ideas were reiterated by leading nationalist leaders, including Thakkar, who attributed the poverty of the aboriginal not so much to the exploitation by the upper echelons of the Hindu caste order as to an

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36. N.K.Bose,The Structure of Hindu Society, 1949, p.165.

37. R.Guha, op.cit, 1996, p.2385.

"unsympathetic and autocratic British administration."[38] The economic changes ushered in by colonialism were seen as an effective pointer to the commonalities between tribes and castes. The problems of the non- tribals, G.S.Ghurye argued, " were more or less similar to those of the so-called aborigines"[39] Thus "the break up of the solidarity of tribal life which had come about through the operation of the British system of revenue and justice...was not a peculiar phenomenon confined to the aborigines.. but was a problem which affected the larger whole."[40]

Similarities in economic conditions between Hindu cultivators and tribals were focussed upon in these arguments which argued for the commonality of class, exploitation and several cultural features between tribals and lower castes. Shifting cultivation, seen as essentially characteristic of the tribal way of life by early colonial ethnographers and travelers like J.Forsyth and hence, as a distinct marker of the differences between tribes and castes, was now viewed as a "crude type of cultivation, the most wasteful of agricultural methods"[41] and hence to be replaced by the more sedentary plough cultivation. The evolutionist notion of associating tribes with the wild forests and the plains with civilization, was evident in Thakkar's comments in a report that he submitted to the Orissa government on tribal policy in which he recommended drastic curbs on swidden cultivation or "bewar". The process of change from shifting to the method of

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38. A.V.Thakkar, op.cit, 1941, p.367.

39. G.S.Ghurye, op.cit., 1943, p.205.

40. Ibid., p.193.

41. G.S. Ghurye, op.cit., 1943, p.135.

plough cultivation was seen as a "natural" one, with most contemporary Indian observers noting with approval the "engendering of the habits of a steady plough cultivation among the peoples". To quote M.N.Srinivas, a pupil of Ghurye's, : "There is nothing to prove that the Baigas are incapable of taking to plough agriculture. We may have to do it with special caution and slowness but that is quite different from maintaining that it can't be done at all".[42]

In the identification of sedentary cultivation as a superior means of production and the association of the caste order with this method of cultivation, is visible the nationalist belief in the concept of economic evolution and the attempts to locate the "tribes"within it. To justify the argument in favour of an easy transition from tribal methods of cultivation to plough cultivation, the caste order was identified as a superior technological force. "The stability of the Indian civilization was made possible only by the stability of the economic centre of gravity of the caste system.[43] "The fundamental truth," Bose asserted, "was the recognition of the superiority of the Varna system... for there was little doubt that the Brahmanically governed society was better off than the society (of the tribes)".[44]

The coherent pattern of dependence that was constructed between the "tribes" and castes within the nationalist discourse appeared to reject, therefore, the late nineteenth century image of the Indian aboriginal as the conceptual

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42. M.N. Srinivas, Review of The Aboriginals in The Journal of the University of Bombay (History, Economics and Sociology), New Series Vol. 12, Number14, January 1944, pp.91-94.

43. N.K.Bose, Structure of Hindu Society, 1975 (Bengali Edition:1949), p.167.

44. N.K. Bose, op.cit., 1975, p.114.

opposite of the caste order and often portrayed this dependence as extending beyond economic commonalities to the realms of religion, language and culture . This discourse rejected any notion of cultural distinctiveness in tribes and critiqued the attempts of anthropologists "to preserve primitive cultural traits for the purposes of science." "It is arranged like this," argued a speaker in the Bombay Legislative Assembly in 1936," if they are made into small states, they will preserve their own traditions just like the anthropologists who want these people as exhibits in a museum for all time to come." The argument against the cultural distinctiveness of tribes was hence, systematically built and attempted to question several notions associated with the "tribe" in preceding discourses.

The nationalist discourse questioned the idea of "tribes" as autochthones, an almost incontrovertably accepted idea not only among the isolationists but among certain sections of the Congress leadership as well. Thus, A.V. Thakkar had called them "the original sons of the soil... (who) were older and more ancient than the Hindus."[45] Ghurye however, correctly perceived the difficulties of arguing against the cultural distinctiveness of tribes if they were granted the status of autochthones. He put forward the opinion, therefore, that "to adjust the claims of the different strata of the Indian society on the ground of the antiquity or comparative modernity of their settlement was a formidably difficult task."[46] Talking of internal migrations as characteristic of Indian history, Ghurye argued: "It is seen from the observations and opinion collated so

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45. A.V. Thakkar, op.cit., 1941, p.354.

46. G.S. Ghurye, op.cit, 1943, p.9.

far regarding the internal movements of peoples, that many... of the so-called aborigines... cannot be considered autochthones... of their present tracts."[47]

The argument against the autochthonous status of "tribes" made it easier to erase possible cultural differences with Hindus, for if tribes were not autochthones, they were not culturally distinct either. In this, Ghurye was joined by several other nationalists and nationalist minded anthropologists/sociologists. The central idea was to portray the tribes as the "wronged brethren" of the Hindu civilizational order. For this, they had to be located within the same category as the untouchables, an idea that had been critiqued and rejected in the isolationist notion of the Indian "tribe". In an article in the Harijan written in the early 1940's, Gandhi stated: "The Adivasis are the original inhabitants whose material position is perhaps no better than that of Harijans and who have long been victims of neglect on the part of the so-called high classes... They (the adivasis) provide a vast field of service for Congress men."[48] Later addressing a prayer meeting, he exhorted Hindus "to show special concern for... the adivasis and the untouchables whom we have so far ignored," and raised the question: "Will Hinduism rise to such heights or will it cling to false values... and thus commit suicide?"[49]

What was being denied here was the identity of tribes as non-Hindus and as a distinctive specie. Indignant at what were perceived to be colonial attempts

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47. G.S. Ghurye, op.cit., 1943, p.9.

48. The Harijan, 18 January 1942.

49. Speech at a prayer meeting, June 23, 1947, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, 1972, Volume 88, p.200.

at separating tribes from Hindus, a speaker in the Bihar Assembly remarked, "They said, "We want protection". Protection against whom? Against the Brahmins, their own brethren? How ridiculous! They were made to go to this extent to say that they wanted to be protected from their kith and kin, who reside in the same country."

The nationalists were therefore, envisaging an unity between tribes and castes, an unity in which late nineteenth century notions of racism were being gradually replaced with the concept of "cultural evolution". In the interests of the project of nationalism which needed to portray the picture of a homogenised, uncontested social order, the nationalist writings appear to have avoided explicit reference to the existence of racial differences between the 'Dravidian tribes' and 'Aryan caste order.' This was a shift from preceding constructions of the "tribe" as the conceptual opposite of the Aryan Brahman, as the "other" which was to be located in a different temporal and spatial order of forms. Further, the use of physical criteria as a determinant of race would have made the justification of assimilation difficult. The nationalist discourse argued that it was not the "tribe" as a race that would inevitably die out so much as "tribal culture."[50]

These notions were reflected in the broad canvas of shared cultural experience between tribes and Hindus, that was painted in this discourse. The animistic beliefs of tribals were viewed as a creation of colonial census officials and the participation of "tribes" in Hindu religious ceremonies focussed upon. "The Gonds, the Kurkus and the Baigas," argued Ghurye, "had each a Hinduised

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50. David Hardiman, The Coming of the Devi : Adivasi Assertion in Western India, Delhi, 1995, p.15.

section, having lived in fairly intimate contact with Hindus over a long time." He concluded that "under the circumstances, the only proper description of these people is... the Backward Hindus."[51] Nationalist leaders appear to have been convinced of the "tolerant, non-proselytising nature of Hinduism,"[52] and argued that there was little to regret if tribes called themselves Hindus. Tribal culture therefore, was "hypothetical," and Gond art, "of the rudest character, often outraging requirements of Hindu orthodoxy --- suited in fact to the mental calibre of a people scarcely yet emerging from mere fetishism."[53] The use of strongly cultural evolutionist terms was evident in the nationalist perception of what was otherwise seen as a distinct marker of tribal identity --- the tribal languages. These were similarly characterised as "uncultivated... rudimentary... indigeneous tongues"[54] to be assimilated into the more copious lingua franca of the plains.

With regard to the process of culture-contact the nationalists agreed that contact with a superior Hindu civilization could leave a "tribe" like the Gonds or the Baigas in a weak and benumbed state. But such effects, it was believed, were far out - weighed by the more positive effects of culture contact. Large sections of tribes were seen as properly integrated into the Hindu way of life, while a certain section was seen as remaining "loosely integrated... living in the recesses

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51. G.S. Ghurye, op.cit, 1943, p.19.

52. P. Kodanda Rao, 4th August 1936 in File number 3b, P. Kodanda Rao Papers.

53. G.S. Ghurye, op.cit, 1943, p.168.

54. Ibid., p.188.

of hills and in the depths of forests"[55] It was towards this latter section that the "constructive and welfare programmes" of the Congress were directed and its process of assimilation carefully recorded.

As communities identified to be "uplifted" and "reformed," the tribes had detailed reform programmes chalked out for them by zealous Congress workers. The chief aims of these programmes were usually to introduce change along Gandhian lines: temperance, the introduction of basic education and Khadi programmes. As early as 1925, Gandhi spoke of the Hos of the Central Provinces as having taken to 'charkha' and khadi, with many of them giving up eating carrion and taking to vegetarianism. The aboriginal areas were being marked out for the "inexhaustible scope that they provided for social work,"[56] the type of which was sought to be differentiated from the work of the Christian missionaries, whose "humanitarian service" was seen as tainted by the "ulterior aims of conversion."[57] On a similar note, Ghurye criticised "the inordinate drinking at tribal festivals" and noted with satisfaction the growing effect of temperance on tribal life. The nationalist conception of the 'ideal tribe,' as is evident from their attitude towards tribal culture and culture contact, appears to have been that of "a quiet fellow, who lived according to Gandhian tenets, while waiting for reforms to rain down on him from above."[58]

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55. G.S. Ghurye, op.cit., 1943, p.19.

56. Young India, 8th October, 1925.

57. Young India, 8 October, 1925.

58. David Hardiman, The Coming of The Devi, 1995, p.208.

Their use of notions of cultural evolution was inclusive of paternalistic ideas as well, evident in the following quote of the opinion of a leading Gandian, Jugatram Dave. "You want us to preserve what we want them to forget," said Dave. "To you these may be just art forms (tribal art form), to us they are a symbol of their orgies and bouts of animal sacrifices and drinking."[59] The nationalist disapproval of what they termed as the "immoral sexual liasions" of the tribes, and of certain tribal dances were reflections of such paternalistic notions, strengthened by their belief in the universality of such values as vegetarianism and abstention from alcohol.

In the politically turbulent 30s and 40s, comments such as those of Dave's need to be placed within a specific historical and political juncture - that of a nation "struggling to come to terms with the problems of its vast and diverse population."[60] The late colonial period was also to simultaneously witness division within the ranks of nationalists and demands for autonomy from certain quarters. It is easier to understand the repeated nationalist emphasis on a unified nation, against this background of growing divisiveness and dissatisfaction with the Congress led national movement among several sections of the populace. "Assimilation" and "integration" were to become key words in the nationalist discourse on tribes and the criticism of the isolationist attempts at exclusion was also accompanied by a growing intolerance towards demands for any kind of autonomy. This was evident, for instance, in the Congress attempts to counter the growth of the Bihar Adibasi Sabha in the 1930's through a series of

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59. Quoted in Hardiman, The Coming of the Devi, 1995, p.207.

60. R. Guha, op.cit, 1996, p.2385.

"constructive and welfare programmes." Rejecting the demands of Jaipal Singh, the Sabha's leader, for a separate Santhal state, the Chief Minister of Bihar, Shri Krishna Sinha was to state : "This is the real object of the Adibasi movement - to keep Chotanagpur always backward so that it may... always be governed by the governor."[61] A.V. Thakkar sounded a similar note of warning in his Poona lecture : "Separatism and isolationism seem to be dangerous theories and they strike at the root of national solidarity... safety lies in union and not in isolation."[62]

To conclude, therefore, the last decades of the colonial era in India were marked by an unprecedented degree of debates within the nationalist, colonial official and anthropological circles, over the concept of the Indian "tribe". These writings appeared to offer many different points of view with regard to the "tribes" and equally varied social agendas. In the conflict and controversy generated through these writings, there appears to have also been suggestions for alternative ways of conceptualising the "tribe" from those of the late nineteenth century writings. Thus, there was a recognition of the constructedness of the category and of the commonalities shared with the category of castes in terms of class and culture. There was also a renewed emphasis on the ideas of protection and of the "pure, untouched tribal" of the Romanticist and Naturalist traditions. This chapter has argued, however, that contrary to the presence of several conflicting and apparently opposed discourses on the "tribe", there was little change in the actual conceptualisation of the category. The nationalists rejected

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61. Rajendra Prasad Papers, Volume 1 M/39 of 1939, p.16.

62. A.V. Thakkar, Poona Lecture, op.cit., 1941.

the colonial notion of the "tribe" as the "other" and the centrality of the theme of race, only to replace them with notions like "self in the other" which served nationalist interests by placing the "tribes" within the folds of the Hindu social order while continuing to define it in clear evolutionist terms. Popular nationalist political narratives, like Mahadev Desai's Story of Bardoli,[63] for example, continued to describe Congress activities among the tribes of Gujarat as "raising the lump", the "lump" here referring to the tribals. The nationalist replacement of terms for tribal communities, like "Kaliparaj" and "Jangal Jati", which were recognised as derogatory, with apparently non-derogatory terms like "adivasi," did not erase the distinction that was made in their writings between the 'wild' and the 'civilised'. The "tribe" continued to be primitivised and essentialised in a manner that was distinctly evolutionist, thereby negating the possibility of any fundamental conceptual breaks with the ideas of the preceding period.

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63. Mahadev Desai, The Story of Bardoli, 1929.

CHAPTER 3

The writings and ideas of Verrier Elwin, the radical missionary turned anthropologist, who lived for several decades among the "tribes" of Central and North-East India forms the focus of this chapter. Elwin's experiences in these areas, his several debates with colonial officials, anthropologists, missionaries and Congress nationalists, and his role in the framing of the tribal policy of independent India, were to contribute towards making him "the most important single influence through whom urban Indians got to know of their countrymen."[1] This chapter is an attempt at studying Elwin's perception of the "tribe" by recognising it as a nodal point in the history of the idea of the Indian "tribe".

Verrier Elwin began writing on tribes from the early 1930's and went on to produce a substantial body of work in the next three decades. While a study of his representation of the Indian "tribe" would have to be based primarily on these writings, a discussion of Elwin's idea of the "tribe" would perhaps be incomplete if the following aspects of his life were not taken into consideration - that Elwin, unlike several others who believed in similar ideals, lived his life among the "tribes", and that in his debates with the nationalists and with the missionary discourses, he often drew on his practical experiences. In the three decades of his life among some of India's lesser known communities, Elwin successively accepted and then rejected the conception of the Indian "tribe" in

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1. R.Guha, "Savaging The Civilised" Economic and Political Weekly, Sept. 1996 p.2376.

these discourses, offering, by the 1940's, his own ideal of the "pure, untouched, standard tribal". And yet, his representation of the "tribe" was also marked by certain "tactical compromises," which threatened to modify and dilute the quality of his adversarial role vis a vis the nationalist and Christian missionary writitings. This chapter, being an exercise in tracing the growth and development of the idea of the "tribe" in Elwin's works, would attempt to understand the reasons behind these "compromises" while tracing, where possible, the continuities in his philosophical ideals.

Elwin's "tribe" in the early 1930's

The image of the "pure tribal" which was to characterise Elwin's later writings was less in evidence in his writings during the initial years in India. What was of significance however, in Elwin's dialogues with the nationalists and the Christian missionaries, was his attempt at representing the Indian "tribe" after being 'introduced' to the tribal life of the country. This makes a discussion of his experiences in the early 1930's essential for understanding his ideas in later years.

Verrier Elwin arrived in India in November 1927, as a student of theology from Oxford and as a Christian missionary. Within less than a decade of his arrival, he was to have severed connections with the Church, established himself as one who was "under considerable influence of his Congress friends,"[2] and was to have discovered a certain "whole-hearted identification with the

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2. Letter from the Secretary of State, dated 23.8.32, Home Department Political, File number F.25/89/32 Poll.

culture of the tribes."[3] Behind this "identification" lay a period of disillusionment with, and opposition to, not merely the ideals and principles that governed the Church but also those that directed the Congress-led national movement, namely, the Gandhian ideals.

Elwin's interest in Christianity was in its elements of scholarship and mysticism, as against its evangelical aspects, which he percieved as representative of the narrow and exclusive sides of Christianity.[4] Drawn towards exploring the possibilities of a reorientation of Christianity and never a missionary in the ordinary sense of the term, Elwin was critical of the Church during his initial years, not so much because of its conversion work as because of its politics. In what was one of his earliest indictments of the missionary movement in India, Elwin attacked the Church for "its shameless support, to a sadistic type of Western imperialism... (its) tacit alliance with a godless capitalist system and ... (its) willful impotence before the menace of war and fascism."[5]

In his autobiography written in 1963, Elwin was to attribute these growing differences with the Church to his "experience in Gandhi's ashram (which) made it difficult to believe in an exclusive form of Christianity", and made him move "slowly but inevitably away from the Church... into a life of religious and intellectual freedom".[6] To understand Elwin's close association with the Congress leaders and the extent of his identification with the ideas of

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3. R.Guha, op.cit., 1996, p.2376.

4. V.Elwin, The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin, 1964, p.99.

5. The Harijan 24 Sept. 1938, quoted in S.Hivale's The Scholar Gypsy, 1946, p.107.

6. V. Elwin, The Tribal World, op. cit, 1964, p.99.

the nationalist movement almost immediately after his arrival in India, one needs only to look at some of his writings of this period.

Unlike his Religious and Cultural Aspects of Khadi[7] which perceived of 'Khadi' and 'Charkha' as "symbols of a new religious humanism",[8] or his Christ and Satyagraha which he described as "a sort of guide book for the Christian revolutionary", Elwin's Truth About India[9] was a clear exposition of his firm belief in India's right not merely to self government but to independence. In a letter written during a visit to London, to Narian Das Gandhi, Elwin noted: "The passage across Europe reflected the deep impression made by Bapu... as also the ceaseless vigilance and far reaching powers of the British government."[10] Elwin had therefore been identified in colonial official circles as "one with known sympathies with and support for the Congress led movement."[11]

Apart from allowing him to identify more closely with the developments in the country, this association with the Congress, more importantly, appeared to have created the initial conditions for Elwin's work among the "tribes". The virtual neglect by the Congress of the problems of the "tribes" as against its attention on other deprived and oppressed sections of society like women and untouchables, combined with Elwin's desire to be in closest contact with the

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7. Published in 1931.

8. Ibid p.29.

9. Published in 1932.

10. File number F. 25/89/32 Home Department Political.

11. File number F.25/89/32. Home Department Political.

people,[12] led to the setting up of his first Gond 'ashram' in the hill village of Karanjia in the Central Provinces. Elwin's decision to live and work among the Gonds was to prove to be a turning point in his life in several ways. Among other things, this decision, ironically, while being inspired by the Gandhian worker, Jamnalal Bajaj, was to mark the beginnings of his differences with several principles of the Gandhian philosophy. Further, it also meant a strengthening of his conflict with the Church and cleared the way for adopting a course of life that rejected the creeds of the Anglican Church and the Hindu Mahatma in favour of what has been called "a celebration of the tribal way of life."[13]

The break with the ideas of the Church as with his later differences with Gandhism, was a gradual process and in the settlement at the Gond village of Karanjia, his agenda retained several important elements from both the Gandhian and Fransciscan ideas which were combined with "European traditions of social work, incorporating temperance, education, health and sanitation."[14] Elwin's writings of the early 1930s which are invariably centered around this settlement and the Gonds, offer several insights into elements which were to constitute his 'philosophy' for the tribal during this period as also of the several intellectual currents that had influenced the process of his representation of the aboriginal. As mentioned above, Gandhian tenets and the views of leading nationalist social workers like Amritlal Thakkar appear to have been important influences. The

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12. V. Elwin, The Tribal World op.cit, 1964, p.74.

13. R.Guha, op. cit, 1996, p.2377.

14. R.Guha, op. cit, 1996, p.2376.

members of the Ashram constituted themselves into a Gond Seva Mandal (reflective of Elwin's admiration for the nature of work being done among the Bhils by Thakkar's Bhil Seva Mandal) and identified their objectives in a manner similar to Congress welfare organisations. They set up schools and dispensaries for the Gonds, worked for the irradication of diseases, opened homes for lepers, struggled for the abolishing of 'begar' and offered a "national education through the national language, Hindi".[15] Simultaneously, there were attempts at recreating 'the national self respect of the Gonds' and introducing cottage industries, although it was admitted that "Khadi work would take some time for its introduction."[16]

Not surprisingly, therefore, there is little evidence of the Romantic and Naturalist traditions that were so central to Elwin's idea of the "tribe" in later years. The Gonds in his Leaves from the Jungle,[17] are a deprived and suffering although noble lot, amidst whom Elwin's Gond Seva Mandal worked to "arouse them from their apathy", "build a new spirit", and "bring some elements of hygiene and healthy living".[18] Elwin's early sketches of village life are conspicuous for their absence of sentiment, their stress on what the aboriginal lacked rather than what he possessed,[19] while he himself is identified as "a

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15. V.Elwin, 'A mission of service in the wilds', The Hindustan Times May 14, 1934.
16. Ibid.
17. Published in 1936.
18. Introduction to Leaves From The Jungle, 1936.
19. R.Guha, op. cit, 1996, p.2376.

young Englishman with a passion for humanity"[20] who had offered to teach a primitive group the best things about civilisation. There are strong evidences of the presence of evolutionist notions in these early constructions of the "tribe" as there are of notions of "difference" between the wild and the civilised and the subsequent portrayal of the tribe as the 'other'. The flavour of his Leaves from the Jungle, as Elwin himself was to remark, "lay in the humour of contrast, the idea of a clergyman recently away from Oxford, having some unusual experiences."[21] This is evident in Elwin's introduction to his first 'tribal' book, The Songs of the Forest, where he talks about the "primitive and ignorant tribes" with "strange knowledge and wierd customs".[22] Francis Young Husband, in his foreword to this text, holds forth a clear exposition of such ideas: "Verrier Elwin really does enjoy living with the very primitive Baigas... living right among them and in their own way and forests... primitives, with their contrasting and quickly changing moods".[23] In a manner similar to the nationalist as well as to some of the colonial anthropologists and administrators, Elwin thus appears to have perceived the poor Gond in paternalistic and unequal terms, as one "who had all to learn and little to teach".[24]

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20. Romain Rolland in the Introduction to the Leaves, op.cit., 1936.

21. V.Elwin, The Tribal World, 1964, p.110.

22. V. Elwin in the Introduction to the Songs of the Forest: the Folk poetry of the Gonds, 1935, London.

23. F.Young Husband in his Forward to the Songs of the Forest, 1935.

24. R.Guha, op. cit, 1996, p.2376.

The writings of this period are however, not totally devoid of the elements which were to define his characterisation of the "tribe" in later years. The Songs of The Forest (a book of Gond folk poetry) for instance, has several references to ideas which are decidedly Romantic in nature. Thus, the poetry of the Gonds, "free of all literary conventions and allusions" was similar to the poetry of Wordsworth, who wrote of "the humble and rustic life where passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity."[25] There are also indications of a growing belief in the ideology of cultural primitivism, an ideology which was to become exemplified in his later writings. The critique of civilisation is, as yet, mild, but is not totally absent. Once again, the ideas of Wordsworth and Gandhi appear to have been drawn upon to critique modern civilisation. There is admiration for the "mud-hut philosophy" of the Gonds, which bids us not to demand too much from life.[26] "Has the primitive any message for the modern world?" asks Elwin, and goes on to answer: "Personally I cannot imagine a "civilised" Gond,"[27] "for all his poverty the Gond finds romance and joy in the village. The town appals him with its noise and bluster ...it is the village that is the place for happiness".[28]

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25. V.Elwin, Songs of the Forest, 1935, p.33.
26. V.Elwin, Leaves from the Jungle, 1936, p.38.
27. V.Elwin, Songs of the Forest, 1935, p.44.
28. Ibid.

The "pure tribal"

Intellectual influences, through important, explain only partially the process of representation of the "tribe" in Verrier Elwin's writings. What would go a long way in completing these explanations were Elwin's practical experiences among the several tribes of the Central Provinces. His idea of the "tribe" and his philosophy have to be seen therefore, as products of these experiences as well as of his interaction with various discourses and his understanding of the political situation of that period. This is particularly evident in the late 1930's and 40's, when the protective instincts of the anthropologist appear to have replaced the agenda of the social worker,[29] a transition that was made possible by a growing familiarity with the language of the Gonds and a fuller appreciation of their life and thought, all of which were to contribute towards an apparently altered image of the Indian aboriginal.

During this period, in the late 1930's and the 1940's, Elwin moved increasingly away from both the nationalist and missionary schools of thought and developed what appeared to be irreconcilable differences with their perception of the "tribe". To his criticism of the subordination of the Church to the state, Elwin now added another dimension--his criticism of conversion work and missionary propaganda among the "tribes" of the Central Provinces. Perceiving such mission work as being necessarily accompanied by a poor notion of tribal morality, Elwin launched a scathing critique: "Looking at the matter from a purely scientific anthropological standpoint, I think there can be little doubt that Christian civilisation is more destructive to primitive tribal life and

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29. R.Guha, Savaging the Civilised: Verrier Elwin, His Tribals and India, 1999, p.180.

morals than any other form of culture."[30] J.P. Mills, Elwin noted, had offered a similar critique of conversion work among the Nagas, where "the suppression of all ornaments, of dancing, of singing, of village feasts... by the missionaries (had spread) an unspeakable drabness over village life."[31] The conflict with the Church thus assumed the dual dimensions of a conflict in terms of its politics and in terms of its attitude towards the tribal way of life, in particular towards tribal morality. It culminated with Elwin's formal break with the Church in November 1935.

Elwin's indictment of the nationalists during this period was grounded in a similar understanding of their perception of the Indian "tribe". Although not as decisive as those with the Church, these differences continued to be a source of conflict with Congress leaders and anthropologists and sociologists with nationalist leanings, in particular during the years leading upto independence. In the early 1930's these differences largely stemmed from the difficulties in applying Gandhian ideas to tribal life. Elwin's experiences among the Gonds had shown him the problems of applying an uniform policy of prohibition on drinking on tribes, as well as the difficulties of implementing the excessive emphasis on diet and the Gandhian philosophy of sex relations. All of these, Elwin argued, could prove to be as damaging to tribal culture as the "false sense of prudery and sin implanted by Christian missionaries."[32] The impossibility of

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30. V.Elwin in the Harijan, 24, September 1938, quoted in S.Hivale's Scholar Gypsy, 1946, p.107.

31. Quoted in S.Hivale's, Scholar Gypsy, 1946, p.108.

32. R.Guha, op. cit, 1996, p.2385.

implementing the khadi programme in areas which were poverty stricken and where cotton did not grow, made the Gandhian programme appear "artificial and uneconomic."[33] Reflective of these differences with the nationalist discourse is Elwin's correspondence with R.T.Peel, the then Secretary of State to India. Recorded in official files as one, who "since his arrival.. had been busy pushing Congress interests"[34] and subsequently denied a passport to return to India while on a visit to England, Elwin was to write to Peel: "I have no intention of taking any part in the civil disobedience movement... I do not think it is right for primitive people to take part in such a movement."[35] Official correspondence later notes that Elwin" is now convinced that the Congress will never do anything for the backward classes in India and that their only hope lies in the protection of British officials and the continuation of British rule."[36]

These were shifts, therefore, from what Elwin had recognised as the two most relevant influences in his life, Gandhism and the Christian religion, in favour of that wholehearted identification with the "tribes". Whether these apparent breaks with the tradition that Verrier Elwin worked in close proximity with, could be translated into conceptual breaks in his idea of the tribe, however, needs analysis. The years of growing differences with Gandhism and Christianity were also the years which saw a shift in Elwin's vocation. He seems to have moved away from the field of active social work (an area which

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33. V.Elwin, The Tribal World, 1964, p.85.

34. File number 2 F25/89/32 Poll. Home Department Political.

35. V.Elwin to the Secretary of State for India, July 30, 1932, File number F25/89/32 Poll. Home Department Political.

36. File number 157/136 Poll. Home Department Political.

he now delegated to his companion, Shamrao Hivale) into one of writing on the tribals and helping them through this medium. "The pen is my chief weapon with which I fight for my poor", wrote Elwin, as he went on to produce a series of rich ethnographic studies of several tribes of Central India. It is from these works, distinguished from the writings of professional anthropologists by the "insider's view" that Elwin offered of tribal life, that one can construct his image of the "tribe" in the late 1930's and 40's.

In his pamphlet, The Aboriginals (published in 1943) Elwin divided the aboriginals into four main cultural divisions: The isolated and "truely untouched primitives", the aboriginals whose lives were being touched by subtle change but retained as yet several characteristic traits, the aboriginals of the third group who were the victims of culture contact and were hence suffering from a "loss of nerve" and finally, the fourth and the smallest group comprising of the tribal elite and identified as the one which had "successfully won the battle of culture contact".[37] From this pamphlet, concerned like the preceding Loss of Nerve,[38] with the problems of the third group, it is possible to identify Elwin's idea of the "tribe" : "The real primitives living in the hills ... do not exist, they really live, with their religion alive, ... their tribal organisation unimpaired, their artistic traditions unbroken and their mythology, vitalising the healthy organism of tribal life".[39] In his The Baiga, described as "the most complete account of an Indian

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37. V.Elwin, The Aboriginals, 1943, p.13.

38. Published from Bombay in 1941.

39. V.Elwin, The Aboriginals, 1943, p.9.

tribe yet published",[40] Elwin describes the subjects of his ethnographic study, the Bhumia Baigas, as "untouched by propaganda of Christian missionaries" and by the "influence of Hindu culture "and hence as the "most primitive and characteristic of all the Baigas."[41]

These untouched and pure tribals, thus "thrived in isolation and had to be sought out in the inaccessible recesses of hills, protected from the debasing contacts with plains.. living a life that was independent and high spirited as wild as the forests."[42] Determinant notions of habitat are visible here as Elwin proceeds to distance his aboriginal from the surrounding plains. "Distributed among the entrancing hills of Danteshwara" the Bison Horn Maria "tended to lose their distinctiveness as they approached the neighbourhood of Jagdalpur".[43] The Baigas, often in order to avoid making obvious tracks leading to their villages, avoid the narrow foot paths", wrote Elwin. "We love our hills" said an Orissa tribal to Elwin, "and we don't want to change. We care nothing for hospitals and schools. All we want is our hills."[44]

By the late 1930's it was obvious that Elwin's ideas were reflective of the ideology of "cultural primitivism" defined by A.O. Lovejoy and George Boas, as "the discontent of the civilised with civilisation or with some conspicuous and

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40. R.Guha, Savaging the Civilised, op. cit, 1999, p.108.

41. V.Elwin, The Baiga, 1943, p. xxix.

42. Ibid, p.131.

43. V.Elwin, Maria Murder and Suicide, 1943, p.11.

44. V.Elwin, Report of a Tour in the Bonai, Keonjhar and Pal laharia States, Bombay 1942, p.8.

characteristic feature of it."[45] "In every age" wrote Elwin, "there have been strong reactions against the artificiality and complexity of civilisation."[46] In his period of work amongst the tribes of the Central Provinces, this was expressed in his idea of the "tribe" which came to include a simultaneous indictment both of modern western civilisation and Hindu caste society. In his various ethnographic works of this period, Elwin sought to increasingly define his aboriginal by locating it within a broader critique of the civilisational process, connecting it often to the barbarities being perpetuated by the ongoing Second World War.

Thus, in the Agaria, "a melancholy tale of the decline of an ancient craft at the hands of state hostility and market competition"[47] this comes through forcefully. "A book about iron", wrote Elwin, "is not wholly out of place in wartime even though it must seem absurd, even fantastic, to turn from the millions of tons of death dealing steel employed in modern battle, to the few thousand tons... (of) the little clay furnaces of Central India."[48] The message was clear. "Let us finally face an unpleasant fact" said the primitivist in his tract, the Aboriginals. "There is no possibility in India and the world as things are today, of substituting civilisation for primitiveness. The only alternative to

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45. R.Guha, op. cit, 1996, p.2378.

46. V. Elwin "Going Native", The Times of India, May 24, 1953.

47. R.Guha, Savaging the civilised, op. cit, 1999, p.109.

48. V.Elwin, The Agaria, 1942, p.xxi.

primitiveness is decadence".[49] The Baiga, thus 'know little of civilisation and thought little of it', exhibiting only the 'vaguest notion of the civilised world'.

Elwin's aboriginal was hence defined by its degree of difference with civilisation, extended to include several of what he recognised as the significant aspects of tribal life. His analysis of the origins of crime in the Maria society begins with an analysis of the Maria (and of the Indian aboriginal in general) as one "with a high reputation for a pacific and kindly character",[50] an obvious attempt at explaining crime away. Maria acts of violence, unlike those of the civilised world, were not pre-mediated and hence were "tragic accidents". Again, while murders in the civilised societies were invariably for material gain, violence among the tribes arose out of disputes over rights and privileges "rather than a desire for possession."[51] For Elwin, therefore, the aboriginal was more likely to be peaceful and uncontentious, with a great fund of natural innocence.[52] The Nagas, wrote Elwin, shared with the advanced nations of Europe, the customs of head hunting and human sacrifice with this difference: "that the poor aboriginal sacrifices only one or two human beings while the great nations offer up millions in the name of empire and enlightenment."[53] An aspect of tribal life which was reflective of such differences with civilisation and critiqued severely by the nationalist and missionaries alike was that of tribal

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49. V.Elwin, The Aboriginals, 1943, p.31.

50. V.Elwin, Maria Murder and Suicide, 1943, p,5.

51. Ibid., p.100.

52. Ibid, p.5.

53. R. Guha, op. cit, 1996, p.2378.

morality. Fiercely defending his aboriginal, Elwin cautioned against "the importing of our own ideas and standards into another culture and judging that culture by ours."[54] The Muria ghotul was regulated by exact and far reaching laws, enforcing a strong sense of domestic morality and conjugal fidelity as against the oppression of women and sexual repression that was characteristic of the plains below.

These were some of the essential elements in Elwin's celebration of the aboriginal and the cultural richness of his life. "As you go up into the Bastar hills, away from the parched and arid plains of Chattisgarh..., the countryside breaks into song about you."[55] Tribal culture thrived in isolation, expressed through innumerable festivals, artistic traditions and dances, "enlivening village life and redeeming it from a crushing monotony." Tribal economic life was "an example in the spirit of economic fellowship and the tradition of communal living,"[56] making "aboriginal life an integrated whole, with no isolated spots, everything related and functioning in its proper place,"[57] defined further by its love of nature. The life of a true aboriginal is simple and happy, enriched by natural pleasures. "For all their poverty, their days are spent in the beauty of the hills... A woman carrying a load pauses for a moment to see the scene below her... it is the sweet forest... the forest of joy and sandal in which they live."[58]

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54. V.Elwin, The Kingdom of the Young, 1968 (Abridged version of The Muria and their Ghotul, 1947), p.242.

55. V. Elwin, The Aboriginals, 1943, p.9.

56. Ibid., p.9.

57. Ibid., p.12.

58. V. Elwin, The Aboriginals, 1943, p.29.

Elwin, thus, combined in himself elements from the Romanticist and Naturalist traditions in his portrayal of the "tribe," much on the lines of nineteenth century ethnographers and travellers like J. Forsyth, an oft quoted name in his works. In this, he also shared grounds with the "isolationist" group of anthropologist-administrators, in particular W.V. Grigson and W.G. Archer who offered (as discussed in the previous chapter) similar portrayals of the "tribe". In his ability to apparently erase all traces of evolutionist thought by "contesting the belief pervasive in nineteenth century anthropology and twentieth century social work that cultures could be ranged hierarchically,"[59] however, Elwin appears to have been different, for he offered a scathing attack of the civilised order and a simultaneous admiration for the superior quality of tribal life. "These tribesmen," he wrote of the Maria, "do not cheat and exploit the poor and the weak. They are mostly ignorant of caste and race prejudice. They do not prostitute their women or degrade them by foolish laws and customs... many of their darkest sins are simply the result of ignorance. A few of them are cruel and savage, but the majority are kind and loving..."[60]

A natural corollary of Elwin's celebration of his untouched tribal was a critique of the process of culture-contact. Although changed political conditions saw shifts in his understanding of the process, the essential argument appears to have remained unaltered : culture contact with surrounding civilisation was an essentially disruptive process, invariably impairing tribal life, and hence had to be regulated. In the 30's and 40's, Elwin's position appears to have been that of

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59. R. Guha, op.cit., 1996, p.2382.

60. V. Elwin, Maria Murder and Suicide., 1943, p.221.

an out and out protectionist. As he was to reflect in later years, "In 1939, what was one to do? It was not a question of preserving Baiga culture, for the Baigas had very little culture of their own--it was a question of keeping them alive."[61] This attitude extended naturally to those elements in which "the tribesmen may not indeed be superior to the finest flower of Oriental or European civilisation, but in which they have a great deal to teach their supposedly more civilized neighbours."[62] These were the elements of thriving aboriginal culture, elements which he celebrated and which on account of increasing contact with the outside world were facing definite extinction. "Is it that there is something infectious about civilized folk so that their very contact destroys the grace and beauty of simple people?"[63] asked Elwin and went on to identify "the dozens of factors which continue to break the nerve and shatter the confidence of the tribesmen." Of these, the colonial economic policies favouring the individual titles to property and creating market for land, stringent forest laws with bans on shifting cultivation, the suppression of the home distillery and the introduction of an alien system of laws in the form of the Indian Penal Code, were recognized as central to the process which set the "tribe" on the road to deprivation and misery. The Baiga, caught in the civilizational process which prevented them from practising their beloved "Bewar" (or shifting cultivation) "had lost the freshness and vitality of their life." "It was as if the people belonged to a different race -- servile, obsequious, timid, of poor physique, their tribal life all in pieces. Part of it, like

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61. V. Elwin, "Beating a dead horse," Seminar, 14 October, 1960, p.26.

62. V. Elwin, The Aboriginals, 1943, p.18.

63. V. Elwin, Loss of Nerve, 1943, p.18.

the right to hunt and practice bewar has been torn up by the roots. The old myths are being forgotten, the old gods neglected. Many of the traditional dances are being abandoned. The soul of the people are soiled and grimy with the dust of passing motor buses. The village has ceased to be a living community; it is now an aggregate of isolated units. The long houses around a common square, so typical of Baiga as of Hill Maria culture, have disappeared and the people separated and scattered into suspicious and often litigious families. Tribal life and tradition has begun to appear slightly ludicrous, even to the tribesmen themselves."[64] This enumeration of the effects of colonial policy on the lives of the aboriginal could read like a page out of the writings of nationalist minded anthropologists like G.S. Ghurye.

What separated Elwin from Ghurye, as from other nationalists and brought him into a conflict which spread over several decades, was his perception of the relationship between the "tribe" and Hinduism. For nationalists like Ghurye who defined tribes as 'Backward Hindus,' to be seen in relation with the surrounding caste order, culture contact was an essential process involving "the strengthening of already existent ties between the tribes and the Hindus through their integration into the caste order."[65] These views were reflected in the writings of leading Congress social workers and politicians. In a letter to P. Kodanda Rao, A.V. Thakkar noted, "These contacts (between tribes and Hindus) though they may be degrading and destructive, cannot be helped, as the poor aboriginal has to live amongst them and be affected by their

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64. V. Elwin, Loss of Nerve, 1943, p.4.

65. G.S. Ghurye, Scheduled Tribes, 1941, p.5.

good or bad points. If ours is a bad country, naturally the aboriginal will be affected for the worse... no doubt efforts should be made to save them from degrading contacts but to think that aboriginals are saints and the people they come in contact with are all devils, is too much to believe."[66]

Elwin's views on the culture contact between these two sections of the populace were radically different and opposed to the nationalist perception, based as they were on a different conception of the Indian tribe. Elwin's aboriginal, as he saw it in the late 30's, was not an incomplete Hindu. "It seems to be", he wrote," the aim of the Congress politics to bring the aboriginals within the Hindu fold and then to treat them as though they had no special claims. This company of the vegetarians and teetotalers would like to force their own bourgeoise and Indian doctrines on the free wild people of the forests. On the other hand, I myself consider the aboriginal to be pre-Hindu and that the adoption of Hinduism will be a major disaster for them... the social and moral outlook of the Congress would cut the taproot of the vitality of the aboriginal Indians."[67] Thus the "Standard Agaria", although dependent on the surrounding Hindu villages and living in close contact with them, had a culture that was "highly characteristic and well preserved." This culture as well as economic practices were defined primarily by their differences with that of the Indian iron smith : "The Agaria burned charcoal and extracted iron, the Lohar did not practice ironsmelting; the Agaria worshipped tribal Gods or demons who were

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66. A.V. Thakkar to P. Kodanda Rao, 17th July 1941, P. Kodanda Rao Papers. File : 8.

67. V. Elwin to William Paton, a missionary, quoted in R. Guha, Savaging the Civilised, op.cit., 1999, p.108.

clearly associated with the ancient Asura, while the Lohar worshipped Hindu Gods or had no special God for his forge."[68] These differences in the conceptualisation of the "tribe" extended to his perception of the nature of changes being induced by culture contact with the Hindu civilisation. Where Elwin gloried in their joyful attitude to sex, Thakkar upbraided the aboriginals for their "crude material relations and promiscuity in sexual matters," where the anthropologist defended the tribal's love of drink, the reformer wished gradually but firmly to introduce prohibition.[69] In a letter to Thakkar, Elwin asserted," I am concerned not with the theories but with life as it is. The fact is that in almost every case, the aboriginal's contact with the outside world is a degrading one... as things are at present, the only 'civilization' which they can possibly come into contact with is an unbelievably degraded one; it is of the low-caste villager or the village money lender (who)... destroy his religion and his morals... (and make him) become the worst of the liars and drunkards."[70]

Pragmatic Compromises

Elwin's attitude towards the relationship between Hinduism and the tribal populations appeared to change in later years, however, allowing him to perceive of the former as a lesser threat to tribal life than that which was posed by Christian missionaries. In an apparent shift from his ideas of the early 30's, the 40's were to see Elwin taking an active part in concerted efforts by Congress

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68. V. Elwin, The Agaria, 1942, p.24.

69. R. Guha, op.cit., 1996, p.2380.

70. V. Elwin to Kodanda Rao, July 7, 1941, P. Kodanda Rao Papers, File number : 8.

workers and Hindu leaders to replace the effects of Christian missionary work on tribal life, with those of Hindu organisational activities.

This change in Elwin's perception of the Indian "tribe" could be attributed primarily to the increasing activities of the Dutch missionaries in the Central Provinces and his criticism of their proselytising activities. This is evident in the fact that Elwin wrote a series of articles in leading newspapers during the 40's, on what he termed as "the Dutch threat to Mandla." Further, in his critique of the Christian missionaries, Elwin found sufficient support from the Congress nationalists whom he also identified as the possible future protectors of his tribals.

But more significantly, Verrier Elwin also appears to have conceded a certain amount of heterogenity to tribal cultures, a recognition that could be attributed to his life in Bastar. Elwin's location of the "tribe" in relation to the surrounding Hindu people was greatly influenced by the nature of contact between the two, which in the context of the Mandla district was necessarily an exploitative one. Apart from the economic exploitation perpetuated by Hindu money lenders, the introduction of alien cultural practices into tribal life in the form of untouchability, prohibition of certain art forms, and the worship of alien Gods, further added to the "loss of nerve" of the aboriginal. In Bastar, however, Elwin appears to have discovered an affinity between Hinduism and tribal religious thought, leading him to conclude that "the religion of the Indian aboriginal outside Assam should be regarded as a religion of the Hindu family with a special relation to the existing catastrophic Shaivaite type but as having a

distinct existence of its own."[71] Basing his understanding on the observance of Hindu festivals by the tribals, in particular of the Dassera festival, Elwin further concluded that "for purposes of census, all the aboriginals should be classed as Hindus by religion, but separate returns of their numbers by race should be provided."[72]

Behind this shift within Elwin's discourse on the "tribe" appears to have been the perceived threat to tribal life by missionary work. Elwin's critique of conversion work by Christian missionaries among the Central Indian "tribes" dates back to the early 30's when he had asserted that "the future of aboriginals all over the world should be in the control of science, not of religion" and that "they should be protected from every kind of missionary."[73] "A liberal rationalistic Hinduism," Elwin had concluded, "would probably do less than any other form of culture to disturb and disintegrate tribal life."[74] It were these ideas which were being primarily revived in the 1940's, as is evident in his correspondence with several Congress workers during this period, including the industrialist, Puroshottamdas Thakurdas and the Congress leader, Bhullabhai Desai. It is possible to argue that through the recognition of similarities between the tribe and Hinduism, Elwin reaffirmed his Indian identity, which had been questioned by Hindu social workers and sociologists,[75] and succeeded in

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71. V. Elwin, Loss of Nerve, 1941, p.35.

72. V. Elwin, The Aboriginals, 1943, p.27.

73. S. Hivale Scholar Gypsy, 1946, p.108.

74. Ibid., p.109.

75. R. Guha, op.cit., 1996, p.2387.

enlisting the aide of several Hindu organisations in abating what he termed as the "missionary threat."

Describing the anti-proselytisation campaign as the "Battle of Mandla," Elwin "appealed to all Hindu leaders to take this matter up and not to rest until Mandla district is liberated."[76] Listing the 'exploitative methods' used by the Dutch missionaries in their conversion work, Elwin sounded a note of caution to the "great Hindu community." "They will be taken from you... They will become a thorn in your side for a hundred years unless you take immediate, urgent and drastic action."[77] The efforts of Hindu reformist organisations like the Arya Dharma Seva Sangh and the Gond Sevak Sangh, along with statements issued by social workers like A.V. Thakkar, appear to have met with a considerable degree of success as is evident from the text of the following letter from Elwin to Thakurdas : "... the anti-proselytisation campaign has made good progress... our campaign had repercussions all over India... missionary activities (are being) forbidden and many converts... are being readmitted to Hinduism."[78]

The attack on missionary propaganda was an extension of Elwin's position against culture contact, which he viewed as necessarily negative for tribal societies. His perception of tribal society was that of an integrated whole, susceptible to disintegration if exposed to sudden and unregulated cultural

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76. Undated typescript titled "Bhumijan Seva Mandal" in Elwin Correspondence, Bhullabhai Desai Papers, p.5.

77. Undated typescript titled Missionaries and the Aboriginals in Bhullabhai Desai Papers.

78. V. Elwin to P. Thakurdas, quoted in the Puroshottamdas Thakurdas Papers.

contact. Perceiving of the missionaries as one such disintegrative force, Elwin veered towards the "Congress minded Hindus," who in the years leading upto independence, appeared to possess substantial power to change the life of the aboriginal. In principle, Elwin was critical of both Christian missionaries and the Congress, both representative of the disruptive forces of civilisation. He acknowledged aboriginal religion, however, to have some affinity with Hinduism, none at all with Christianity.[79] Thus, when faced with the possibility of a complete erosion of tribal values by Dutch missionary propaganda, this defender of the aboriginal conceded what could perhaps be called a "tactical compromise" (which might have found reflections in his conceptualisation of the "tribe" he launched a movement to awaken the Hindu community in its duty towards the aboriginal.[80]

That such shifts in the portrayal of the "tribe" were not reflective of fundamental changes in his conceptualisation, was evident in his continued attempts to lend a certain degree of distinctiveness to the aboriginal. In the charged political atmosphere of the period, the reiteration of the essentials of his philosophy had to be done in a subtle manner, but were stated nevertheless. For instance, although the religion of the Indian aboriginal was recognised as similar to that of the Hindu family, it was also recognised as "having a distinct existence of its own,"[81] characterised by a freedom and flexibility unlike the greater Hindu tradition.

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79. R. Guha, op.cit., 1996, p.2387.

80. "Bhumijan Seva Mandal," op.cit., in Bhullabhai Desai Papers.

81. V. Elwin, Loss of Nerve, 1941, p.35.

This attempt to align his principles with the practical needs of the aboriginal was henceforth to become characteristic of Elwin. It was expressed more forcefully during his tenure as the Adviser of Tribal Affairs in the North East Frontier Agency, a period during which he saw the translation of several of his ideas into policies for tribals. The shift from the life of an anthropologist, which allowed for a great deal of "eccentricity and freedom"[82] to that of an official, "stimulating and directing research by other people,"[83] does not appear to have been accompanied, however, by corresponding shifts in his conceptualisation of the "tribe." Elwin distanced himself sufficiently from several of his ideas of the 30's and 40's to reaffirm his Indian identity before an increasingly hegemonic ideology of Indian nationalism. Yet he also continued to resist the assimilation of tribes within this hegemonic ideology and retained those several essential elements of "adversarial thought" that differentiated his ideas sufficiently from the nationalist conception of the "tribe".

Elwin officiated as the Adviser of Tribal Affairs in the North East Frontier Agency from 1954 to 1964, a highly unstable and politically turbulent period for the region, marked as it was by demands for political autonomy from several tribal organisations. As part of an administration which was facing the rather difficult task of politically uniting sections of a populace which disclaimed any affinity with "mainstream" politics and culture, Elwin found his ideas naturally constrained by his official position. "Remember that we are not by

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82. V. Elwin, The Tribal World, 1964, p.231.

83. Ibid., p.231.

culture or even by race Indian" asserted an educated Mishmi to Elwin, "if you continue to send among us officers who look down on our culture and religion and above all, look down on us as human beings, then, within a few years, we will be against you."[84]

In an apparent dismissal of his ideals of the pre-'47 period which he described summarily as "a policy advocated to meet a set of special circumstances... (which) does not hold when these circumstances have changed,"[85] Elwin asserted after his assumption of office: "Then came independence and the tribal population found their place on the map.. there came a new stress to bring the tribes out of their long isolation and integrate them with the rest of India... I myself had accepted the position that some of the smaller and remotest tribes would have to remain out of the picture for the time being... this was never what might be called a 'philosophical' position."[86] Further, in a reply to Ghurye, Elwin referred to his espousal of "Integration" as "an effective alternative to the old polarities they once had."[87] Appropriately, it would seem, the chapter on the fundamental problems of the NEFA tribes in Elwin's Philosophy for NEFA,[88] was headed by a quote of A.V. Thakkar's : "Separation and isolation are dangerous theories and strike at the root of national

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84. Quoted in V. Elwin, "Report of a tour in Lohit Frontier Division," November 1955. File 138, Elwin Papers.

85. V. Elwin, The Tribal World, 1964, p.293.

86. Ibid.

87. V. Elwin, "Beating a dead horse", Seminar, 14 October, 1960, p.26.

88. Published in 1959.

solidarity. Safety lies in union and not in isolation."[89] Times had changed, Elwin appeared to be asserting, and he with them.

For constructing Elwin's idea of the "tribe" during this period, there are, apart from his several published works, a large collection of his private papers comprising primarily of official reports and correspondence, tour reports and some personal correspondence. Reading through this collection, it is possible to argue that Elwin's conception of the "tribe" had not changed after all. It is necessary to remember that in the political context of the late 1940's, even terms like "protection" were being carefully replaced with politically more correct ones like "self-reliance". The fundamental policy had been settled : "whether they like it or not, the tribes were going to be civilised; their country would be opened up."[90] In this changed political atmosphere, "suffused by a unified and unitary nationalism,"[91] it is interesting therefore, to identify the persistence of several essential elements which had been central to his definition of the Indian aboriginal in the late colonial period.

Elwin sought to locate his idea of the "tribe" during this period within what he called his "philosophy for the North Eastern Frontier Agency". This philosophy, which he recognised as "vigorously positive", aimed at an integration of the tribes into the Indian polity without alienation, approaching them in a spirit of comradeship while simultaneously projecting India as a

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89. V. Elwin, A Philosophy for NEFA, 1959, p.29.

90. V. Elwin, "Beating a dead horse," Seminar, 14 October 1960, p.25.

91. R. Guha, op.cit., 1996, p.2387.

protecting and liberalising force.[92] In his formulation of his philosophy Elwin appears to have received considerable support from the ideas of the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. "I am alarmed to see how anxious people are to shape others according to their own image or likeness and to impose on them a particular way of living" said Nehru, "I am not at all sure which is the better way of living. In some respects I am quite certain that their's (tribal's) is better. Therefore it is grossly presumptious on our part to approach them with an air of superiority... There is no point in trying to make them a second rate copy of ourselves."[93] Again in his forward to Elwin's Philosophy of NEFA, Nehru elaborated on what was termed as the tribal Panchsheela.

Nehru's idea of the "tribe" therefore allowed it considerable cultural distinctiveness and was often accompanied by indictments of the civilizational process. Describing himself as a 'humble missionary of the Nehruvian gospel' Elwin could continue with his critique of civilization, albeit in a more controlled manner. His entire philosophy for the North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA), it could be argued, was an attempt at emphasising the distinctiveness of tribal culture and reflected his belief in the ideology of cultural primitivism.

Thus research officers in the NEFA hills, who were to aid in this process of integration, were to avoid approaching tribal life from their own angle, "taking care not even to disturb the architectural pattern of tribal villages." An entire section in Verrier Elwin's work, A Philosophy for NEFA has been

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92. V. Elwin, A Philosophy for NEFA, 1959, p.28.

93. Nehru's speech at the opening session of the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Areas Conference, New Delhi, June 7, 1952.

devoted to the relevance of the 'psychological aims' of the philosophy behind the administration. "For a successful policy whereby India... would become real to the tribals, political integration would necessarily have to be supplemented by psychological integration."[94] Terms like "animism" had to be dropped from the official vocabulary, for as a description of tribal religion it was not only inadequate but suggestive of inferiority.[95] Elwin continued to view tribal life as "happy and vigorous", with "the evils that are popularly supposed to mar their lives" being seen as "grossly exaggerated and hardly as bad as those which disgrace modern society."[96] Such attitudes were necessary to erase possibilities of 'detribalization' and assimilation which in a manner reminiscent of his critique of the nationalist position on assimilation in the 30's and 40's, Elwin described "as a possible solution of the future of India's tribesmen... (but) with serious disadvantages... it deprived the mass of the people of their standards and values without putting anything comparable in their place."[97] Although explicitly directed against "Christian missionaries, social reformers and village uplifters,"[98] Elwin's critique of the assimilationist view continued to be attacked by nationalist minded anthropologists and sociologists as well. Reflecting an approach towards the tribal predicament that was opposed to that of Elwin's, N.K. Bose, for instance, commented on 'the degree of selective sympathy for

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94. V. Elwin, Philosophy, op.cit., 1959, p.32.

95. V. Elwin to T.N. Kaul, File number 8, Elwin Papers.

96. File number 64, Elwin Papers.

97. V. Elwin, A Philosophy, op.cit., 1959, p.49.

98. Ibid., p.48.

the tribals when the actual situation was one in which cultural elements of different orders were mixed with one another."[99]

Within the official discourse, however, there appear to have been attempts at allowing tribes a certain degree of cultural distinctiveness, without the accompanying notions of paternalism and evolutionism. The policy of the Government of India for the administration of NEFA stated: "Certain words have a definitely derogatory implication... we would be wise to avoid them... the word "uplift" has similar connotations... the word "reform" itself should be avoided."[100] In what was in many ways an echo of Elwin's idea of the "tribe" and its future, Jairamdas Daulatram, the then Governor of Assam noted: "Just as Hindu Society in Assam recoiled against the approach of the Christian proselytising programme, so also will one day the tribal people recoil against our approach to them... we must shed our subtle sense of superiority."[101]

In a recent biography of Verrier Elwin, the author describes him as "a defender of the aboriginal,"[102] as one who "imaginatively interpreted the world of the tribals to that of the civilised." Elwin, it has been argued, reflected "a strand of adversarial thought" suppressed by the world view dominant during the first decade of Indian independence."[103] Elwin's celebration of the tribal way of life, the apparent rejection of evolutionist thought and paternalistic notions in

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99. N.K. Bose, in The Statesman, May 2, 1957.

100. The policy of the Government of India for the administration of NEFA, File : 166 Elwin Papers.

101. File number : 166, Elwin Papers.

102. R. Guha, Savaging the Civilised, op.cit., 1999.

103. R. Guha, op.cit., 1996, p.2388.

his narration of the characteristics of tribal culture and his belief in the ideology of cultural primitivism appears therefore to reject the paradigm of continuity within which the idea of the "tribe" was often located. In other words, Elwin appears to have offered an alternate conceptualisation of the "tribe" that questioned several of the essential notions like that of race and evolution which were central to most of the late 19th century and early 20th century discourses on the 'Indian tribe.'

Against this background, references in his works to "the savage absence of civic instinct" among the Marias or to their "apparent insensitivity to mental suffering", are interesting, suggestive as they are of the continued use of evolutionist notions in Elwin's representation of the "Indian tribe." Thus the timidity of the Agaria mind was reflective of "an instinct which seems to go very far in the animal kingdom."[104] "Immature and helpless, the Maria prisoner had no reserve of philosophy or intellectual fortitude to draw on in a crisis,"[105] with most of his crimes arising out of "powerful oral needs" which reflect the infantile nature of (his) culture."[106] Such people of infantile nature' were therefore naturally unfit for any kind of modern political organization and movements. Like Grigson, who had described his experience of tribal voting in the Central Provinces as "pathetic processions of bewildered aboriginals into the polling booths, of the meaning of which they had not the foggiest

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104. V. Elwin, The Agaria, 1942, p.253.

105. V. Elwin, Maria Murder and Suicide, 1943, p.208.

106. Ibid., p.146.

conception,"[107] Elwin also voiced a strong disapproval regarding not merely tribal suffrage but any kind of contact with contemporary political movements. Thus "the Baiga had no nationalist feeling... no champion to fight for them, no spokesman to voice their grievances."[108] These are explicit evidences of evolutionist and paternalistic portrayals of the "tribe," reinforcing the differences between the wild and the civilised in a manner not unlike that of the nationalists and colonial administrator - anthropologists.

These perceptions of tribal political consciousness remained unaltered during his tenure in the North East Frontier Agency as is evident from the following extract from the confidential files of the NEFA government: "The possibilities of political infection (for the moderate Nagas) will be enormously increased," noted Elwin in a letter to the Adviser to the Governor, "political institutions... must obviously come... but they should not come until the people are ready for them."[109] This at a time when the politics of the Naga Hills were being dictated by Naga insurgent groups.

Evolutionist notions persist, therefore, in Elwin's representation of the aboriginal, making it difficult to credit him with having "inverted the cultural hierarchy which was the essence of social evolutionism."[110] Although few and often hidden beneath his effusive celebration of the superiority of his aboriginal, such representations tended to reduce the possibility of any significant conceptual

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107. Quoted in Nandini Sundar, Subalterns and Sovereigns: An Anthropological History of Bastar 1854-1996. 1997, p.163.

108. V.Elwin, The Baiga, 1939, p.131.

109. V. Elwin Papers, File number 7.

110. R. Guha, op.cit., 1996, p.2378.

break in his ideas, reaffirming thereby the difficulties in transcending such notions in the representation of the "tribe." What is of relevance, however, is Elwin's attempt at representing the Indian 'aboriginal' in a manner that questioned the notion of the "tribe" in several contemporary discourses. Beneath their "tactical compromises", Elwin's writings display a continuity in the consistent philosophical stance which posited an image of the "tribe" that was rooted in a recognition of its identity, separate and distinct from the rest of society.

CONCLUSION

In tracing the specific career of the term "tribe" in the Indian context, the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century emerge as periods which were of considerable significance. While the image of the Indian "tribe" as a distinct category , different from and inferior to, both the colonisers and the Hindu caste order, was strengthened in the discourses of the last decades of the nineteenth century, the discourse on the "tribe"in the period that followed was marked by debates broadly relating to the conceptualisation of the category in contemporary works as well as in the writings of the preceding period. The issues raised during these periods were to become the central concerns of the tribal question not only in late colonial but in post colonial India as well.

The "objectification" of India by the colonial power, which involved the coding of the populace in ways that rendered it increasingly available for colonisation, and the subsequent identification of the "tribe" as a section of the colonised about whom such knowledge was both posssible and necessary, must be seen as fundamental to the process of representation of this category in the writings of the period under study. Therefore, while analysing the nature of evangelical and intellectual interests in the categorisation of the "tribe, the concern of the first chapter had been to argue for the centrality of imperial needs in this process and explore certain aspects of the colonial essentialisation of the term as reflected in the discourses under study.The close interactions between certain intellectual currents in Europe and the colonial state in India, between the discipline of anthropology and colonialism, and between evangelical ideals and colonial objectives were also taken up for discussion and were

viewed as having contributed to the process of objectification of the Indian "tribe". The relationship between anthropology and colonialism, in particular, has been seen as having substantially aided the colonial essentialisation of the "tribe", with the official ethnographic discourse involving little more than the adddition of endless new categories to the array of castes and customs arranged by the colonial state.

The theories and ideas that evolved out of these interactions served to further imperial interests in India. Developing during a period when the project of colonialism was being subjected to severe criticism from certain sections of the population of Britain, Social Evolutionism and Racism, for instance, successfully represented the Indian "tribe" in a manner that helped to justify colonial domination. The alternatives to racial evolutionism,as in the functional and occupational theories of Denzil Ibbetson, do not appear to have gained much ground, as is evident from the colonial official, ethnographic and missionary writings on the "tribe" during this period. Rather, both the themes of race and evolution appear to have remained fundamental to the discourse on the Indian aboriginal, thereby aiding in the reinforcing of social hierarchies which located the "tribe" at the bottom of the civilizational ladder.

Rooted as they were in a strong critique of the colonisation process, the writings on tribes by Indian nationalists and nationalist minded scholars in the 1930's and 1940's tended to develop a discourse that was essentially opposed to the ideas of the isolationists (a group ofBritish anthropologist - administrators who had an effective role to play in tribal policy framing). Thus, in an apparent departure from the process of representation of the "tribe" in preceding writings,

this discourse questioned the construction of the category and identified it as a part of a knowledge system that was typically colonial. This critique was not accompanied, however, by a rejection of the evolutionist notions which was characteristic of the colonial image of the Indian tribe in both the late nineteenth and early twentieth century writings . Rather, the nationalist preoccupation with the construction of a homogenous cultural universe of the Hindus and the tribes, based on what they identified as class and cultural commonalities and a subsequent denial of any distinctiveness to the tribal societies , only reaffirmed certain assertions of the preceding nineteenth century discourse ---that "aboriginals" or "primitives" were the 'backward sections of society' and hence in need of reform and assimilation into a superior civilisational order .

The nationalist writings were not representative of a homogenous Indian discourse on tribes. Among others, the writings of early Indian anthropologists like S.C.Roy and D.N.Majumdar while continuing to represent the "tribe" within a broad evolutionist framework, questioned the nationalist use of notions of cultural evolution . In a manner that bore resemblance to the isolationist image of the "tribe", this strand within the Indian anthropological discourse focussed on what they identified as racial and hence irreconcilable differences between Indian tribes and castes and envisaged a future in which "tribes" would be free from all forms of civilisational contact, a perception that was laced with Romanticist ideals.

Verrier Elwin, whose ideas on the Indian "tribe" made him simultaneously an authority on the tribal question as well as a controversial figure in acacdemic and political circles, appeared to have succeeded in rejecting

evolutionism and racial notions in the representation of the Indian "tribe".His espousal of the ideology of cultural primitivism, his scathing critique of the modern civilisation and his idealisation of the tribal way of life in the Central Provinces , Bastar and the north eastern region only strenghtened the conviction that "he thought little of civilisation". The concluding chapter of the dissertation has argued however, that contrary to such readings , Elwin appears to have accepted the ideal of the Indian adivasi as a 'backward' and 'savage' being with a weak and fragile community life which needed the protection of essentially superior societies. In the late 1930's and 40's, Elwin tended to identify these societies with the Hindu caste order, a position which not only threatened to place him in the same ranks as the nationalists whom he had criticised,but also indicated the presence of evolutionist notions in his conceptualisation of the Indian "tribe."

This work has been an attempt, therefore, at studying certain aspects of the concept of the Indian "tribe". Tracing the initial emergence of the category to its construction by the colonial state in the last decades of the nineteenth century, this work brought up the narrative to the first half of this century, a period when the definition of the "tribe" was being severely contested in several discourses, in particular the anthropological , the colonial official and the Congress nationalist. The debate, however, does not appear to have ended in the late colonial period. Rather, differences in the representation of the "tribe"and efforts to conceptualise it , continues to be a feature of present day writings on the tribal communities of the country. This could be a defence, perhaps, of the relevance of this work and would also indicate the need to continue searching for alternate ways of looking at the Indian "tribe".

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