Munda Politics and Land: Understanding Indigeneity in Jharkhand, India
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ABSTRACT

The eastern state of Jharkhand in India has been the site of contention between Adivasi communities, like the Munda, and the national government. This is a relationship between these communities and centralized, outside power that has existed for centuries in different forms. To understand this ongoing conflict, we need to understand the root causes of contention. Various scholars have traced this to a general rejection by Adivasis of State-sanctioned neoliberal development projects like land-grabbing and mining. I analyze, based on a fifteen month long ethnographic study conducted from May 2017 to December 2018, the meaning of land for the Munda community, and how these meanings underlie the Adivasi-State conflict, based on several forms of qualitative data. I argue that at the core of this ongoing conflict lie questions of identity construction and representation, neoliberal market forces, gender, and a historical narrative of resistance against outsiders. Importantly, to best understand Adivasi politics and their relationship to their local environment, one must actively listen to how these communities represent themselves.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

The eastern state of Jharkhand in India has been the site of an ongoing conflict between the Munda Adivasi (indigenous) community and the State. This contentious relationship has existed for several centuries and continues until now. Various scholars describe the conflict as the general rejection of the attempts of State and corporate actors to grab lands in order to carry out neoliberal development projects such as mining and hydroelectricity dams in the region. I analyze, based on a fifteen-month long ethnographic study conducted from May 2017 to December 2018, the meaning of land for the Munda community, and how these meanings underlie the Adivasi-State conflict. I argue that the current ongoing conflict underlie questions of identity construction and representation embedded in the historical narrative of resistance against outsiders. More specifically, one must understand the subaltern communities, such as the Munda Adivasi, through their discourses.

women's guidance, who hosted me in their homes and treated me with love and warmth. It is not possible to name them all here.

My greatest debts are to my family members, my grandmother, my parents, my siblings, and my partner, Gunjan Singh, who all provided me with unwavering support and love throughout this journey. This dissertation was not possible without you all.

Photographs included in this dissertation were taken by me, except where noted.

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1   CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It was another oppressively hot summer afternoon in Khunti, Jharkhand. I was at the District Collector's office with some Adivasi mazdoor (casual laborers) who had jobs under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). We were all waiting to meet with the officials to demand their unpaid wages. We had been waiting for the past two hours and were getting restless. The office was newly constructed, the walls clean and painted white, except the corners stained with the rustic red color of tobacco spit. There were few places to sit so we all took turns. I went inside the clerk's office, which was full of dusty files. There were a few people sitting in a group, their desks pushed close to each other. I asked one of the clerks how much longer it would take to meet the official. With a disgusted face, he responded with no clear answer, as if I had asked a wrong question. I again repeated my question but this time in English and added "Sir" at the start. He looked at me and said in Hindi, "We have forwarded your application; your chance will come soon." He still did not give any clear answer regarding the waiting time, but I was happy at least his demeanor changed so rapidly and he took action. Javier Auyero (2012) writes about waiting in bureaucratic spaces as a form of power over poor communities as a mechanism to marginalize them. This is certainly the case here. Akhil Gupta's (2012) ethnography on the working of bureaucracy demonstrated how the bureaucratic mechanisms used by the Indian state to look after the poor systematically produce arbitrary outcomes whose consequences can be catastrophic.

Looking back, I remember asking myself why he was so hostile at first. It might have had something to do with the fact that I then worked with the NREGA Sahayata Kendra, Khunti (HELP Center), an organization run by locals with the help of activists, to act as a bridge between the local administration and the Adivasis for addressing grievances related to the rural

development welfare programs. This work required me to make frequent trips to the District and Block offices of Khunti. Since we were not a registered NGO, and conducted social audits of State programs highlighting needless delays and corruption, most of the government officials did not like us.

Suddenly I noticed a local shouting at the top of his voice, "You will not understand this. You are not an Adivasi!" He was dressed in torn, muddy pants which were folded up till his knees, and slippers with blue straps stitched from the middle with white thread. The clerk came out and shouted at him, "Don't come here, drunk!" Another clerk came out and yelled at him, "Do not come here again, drunk! You smell of hadiya! If you want us to listen to you, then come sober over here." The Adivasi boy turned around and shouted, "Babu Saheb! Till land with the oxen for even one day under the hot summer sun and then you will understand us and the hadiya better." (Refer to Figure 7- Munda Men Tilling The Land) This incident startled me. The local administration did not only fail to address any of the grievances made by the Adivasi of the region, but also often mistreated them. This behavior was very normal in government offices in several states including Bihar and Jharkhand. Most of the staff working in the offices were upper caste Hindus, along with a few Adivasis who often acted as translators between the groups. This moment remains very stark in my memory until now: the anger and disgust the officials had in their voices still echo in my ear. This scene reminded me more of a movie made in the colonial Raj, in which British officials did not treat the Indians as equals to themselves, paternalistically amused at their mannerisms and habits.

One of the local community members who was an active member of Sahayata Kendra, Rajendaran, knew the Adivasi boy who had been kicked out of the office. Rajandran was in his mid-twenties, tall, with a long face. He loved playing football and was a part of the village

team. Football remains a popular sport in the region, unlike the rest of India which predominantly loves cricket. Rajandran approached him and asked, "What happened brother?" He said, "my father was picked up by the local police! They said he is a Maoist informer! He hasn't returned home. I have made several trips to the police stations and the district office but they have not entertained my application. Every time I come here they make some excuse to send me back." He then added, "All these military trucks and tanks you see patrolling in the region, are not for the Maoists, they are here for us!" I looked at him in his eyes, surprised, but I decided to stay quiet; I just wanted to hear his conversation with Rajandran. They said, "It is to scare us, so that they can easily take our land away."

The wages due to the workers ultimately remained unpaid for several months. The case was eventually filed in the labor court of Ranchi, the capital city of Jharkhand state. This meant several trips to Ranchi which would roughly cost Rs 80 (1.30 US dollar) at that time and for the mazdoor it meant losing wages for the day they went to Khunti. Ultimately, after a wait of two years, the wages were paid to the workers. This case is unique since wages of many Adivasi mazdoor who have worked in government programs remain unpaid through today.

These questions posed by the Adivasi Munda locals have stayed alive in my memory. At the time, I was unable to understand why after Jharkhand achieved its independence as an indigenous state in the year 2000, nothing has changed for the Munda Adivasi. They still remain impoverished and are struggling for basic development resources. This experience led me to start to question the Munda community's motivations for defending their land outside neoliberal forces.

In 2000, the Indian state of Jharkhand achieved its independence from Bihar and received recognition as a separate "indigenous" state. Jharkhandi independence was a result of long struggle by the Adivasi (indigenous) majority population and a cause of celebration among progressive and activist circles of indigenous rights activists and organizations. They strongly believed that independence from the Hindu-dominated Bihar, which they said treated Jharkhand as an internal colony, would bring solutions for the chronic underdevelopment and political instability plaguing the region. Jharkhand is home to the Munda tribe, an Adivasi community that has preserved many of their traditions, religious practices, language, and self-governing institutions into the present. The goal of independence was economic and political empowerment of the Munda: development that respects Adivasi rights and customs, especially in relation to autonomy over the lands they inhabit.

This initial excitement was short-lived, however. Extreme poverty and appalling rates of malnutrition have remained mostly unchanged, and corporate land grabs have increased, causing widespread political conflict. Jharkhandi independence offered little protection from neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is best understood as "accumulation by dispossession" which in Jharkhand has expressed itself as the opening of natural resources for mining, a decrease in welfare benefits to indigenous communities, the weakening of laws that protected traditionally indigenous lands from being sold to non-tribal actors and from being exploited for commercial purposes, among other shifts (Harvey 2004, Ghosh 2006). In response, Munda communities have strongly resisted these efforts through violent and non-violent means including protests and bandhs (general strikes), and supporting different groups, some of whom the government treats as extremists in the region.

However, rather than being a monolithic group, Munda political agency is divided among numerous, seemingly contradictory political movements, including some groups that support neoliberal policies. Mundas have variously supported the Maoist insurgency, alongside strong support for the traditional left, indigenous rights activists and organizations, rightwing political parties including the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), and the rights-based approach of development promoted by the State, developmental organizations, and the Right to Food campaign, among others. But at other moments, they resist each of these movements and programs.

These seemingly contradictory alliances exist alongside a nearly complete rejection of nearly all neoliberal development projects such as land grabbing and mining. Further, they reveal a foundational concern with indigenous communal rights toward their lands, a longstanding goal of the Munda community of resistance. This research aims to understand how the Munda conceptualize their land and how this animates their politics. My dissertation research project is an ethnographic study of Munda everyday life which seeks to understand the relationship between the Munda Adivasi and the land and forest they make claims to be their own. This research study analyzes the meanings of land and forest for themselves, and how those meanings shape contemporary Adivasi politics as they confront the Neoliberal State.The aim of this research is to understand how the Munda conceptualize their land and how this animates their politics. This project is an ethnographic study of Munda everyday life which seeks to understand and explicate the meanings of land and forest for themselves, and how those meanings shape contemporary Adivasi politics as they confront the Neoliberal State.

1.1   MUNDA'S CONNECTION TO LAND

I was told by Mundas several times that maintaining autonomy over their land was an existential aim: "if our lands are evicted, our whole existence is rooted from here, which means

we anyway get murdered (sic)." This argument is among the many claims of the Munda tribe which outlines their rationale for defending their land. During several discussions I had in the Munda community during my fieldwork, both men and women vehemently argued that their entire life and in turn their identity is defined by their intrinsic relationship to the land, water, forest as they inhabit. One can argue that the Munda conceptions of land and identity resemble "essentialist" discourses of indigeneity, which stereotype certain attributes as prominent in and exclusive to this particular community.

Scholars like Shah (2007) have argued that the romantic imagery of adivasi communities living in harmony with the forest and lands have rendered these communities open to the capitalist development forces. I do not understand this, why does essentialism leave them open to capitalism? She further blames the "foreign educated activists" for essentializing the Adivasi and their way of living in "harmony" with the forest and land. She argues that the categorization of communities as "indigenous" further marginalizes these communities by pushing them to live in the forest they inhabit, and framing their agency that contradicts this essentialist imagery as inauthentic.

The drive to essentialize Adivasi communities is very common, both in the history of ethnographic scholarship and the State, first under the British and then New Delhi. Others have argued that this is perhaps in part due to the effects of colonization, discourses of indigenous rights, but also due to the history of resistance to colonial and post-colonial state formation and capitalist accumulation by dispossession (Baviskar, 2006) However, I will show that both essentialism and critiques of essentialism fail to explain why the Munda Adivasi have time and again fought to defend their land and forest.

For instance, Munda Adivasis are currently running a new political and social movement without any help from any "foreign educated activist," the Pathalgarhi movement which I witnessed during my field research. The main demand of the movement made by the Munda Adivasi is autonomy over their territory and forest, within the periphery of the Indian nation-state. They believe that this demand for sovereignty over their forest is their political and social right, which I will show in this dissertation originates out of Adivasi alterity in response to a changing factor, i.e. the rise of neoliberalism. Essentialist frameworks that dominate Adivasi and Indigenous Studies have failed to explain the motivations of the Munda Adivasi claims over their land and forest through the Pathalgarhi Movement.

At first it may seem that I am making an essentialist argument- that land is central to the Mundas. However, I argue that the anti essentialist look at the choice, agency and history of these communities which defines the politics of these communities.

What is critical here is that these hegemonic frameworks have missed the most important aspects of Munda everyday life. Munda Adivasi lives are rooted in the land and forest: for instance they carry out subsistence agriculture which means they grow only as much as they need; they collect forest products like wood for cooking, herbs for medicines, and vegetables and fruits for their meals. They also hunt animals from the forest and fish from the water. In addition, various cultural practices and festivals revolve around their forests and land, reflected in their music, dance and other cultural practices. What is crucial here is to note that they firmly believe in utilizing as much as they need and from the environment as they recognize the criticality of the presence of nature and environment for their existence. These everyday choices and practices underlined the Munda alterity or way of being.

This is not fixed or static (essentialism); it is an evolving and dynamic system, and some people dissent, but it is nonetheless real for a vast majority of Munda who reproduce a distinctive way of being in their everyday lives.

Munda alterity, I argue, is embedded in the everyday lives of Munda Adivasi men and women, not in pre-conceived notions about their epistemology or ontology. For instance, during my field research I witnessed how the Munda Adivasi communally governed the natural resources like livestock, the river, the land, and the trees through the Gram Sabha system, to ensure an effective way of controlling Nature without exploiting it, the presence of which is critical for their existence. The importance here of their self-governance system will be explored further in later chapters.

The epistemological meanings of their relationship with land and forest becomes more pronounced as one observes the Munda way of living as they confront and negotiate with the Neoliberal State. For instance, the elephant's and other wild animals' recent, increasing, and harmful entry into the community due to deforestation, for a Munda Adivasi is a manifestation of neoliberal Indian state that seeks to invade their lives and lands. In this case, to negotiate with this manifestation of the neoliberal state as a community, they ensured that no one in the community harmed any invading elephant, which may lead to State officials visiting. Instead, they worked together as community guardians at night to prevent animals from entering their paddy fields, as they know as a community it is important to stay together and protect their food and fields.

As I analyze meanings of the land and forest of the Munda community, it would be incorrect to leave the Munda alterity unchallenged without teasing out the meanings of the land and forest through a gendered lens. The Munda Adivasi women's epistemologies are

embedded in their knowledge and relationship with the State is often seen as a part of Munda Adivasi identity as a whole and misses the important gendered understanding of these women who have actively participated in creating the Munda Alterity and self representation. These women, through the knowledge they gain as full participants in movements like Pathalgarhi, are active agents of negotiations with the Neoliberal State. For instance, their choice of choosing community land rights over individual land rights is based on the idea of keeping the land and community together as the State invades them. These women actively use their knowledge of herbs, plants, forests, etc to deal with medical needs, food insecurities in their kitchen and field spaces as they deal with the failures and violence of the neoliberal State. As the question of gender shows here, which I will more fully explore in Chapter 4, "who" describes, constructs, and represents Munda identity is a crucial question to understanding the connection between the community and their land.

1.2 THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

The various definitions of "Adivasi," "Tribe" and "Indigenous" speak to the importance of language in tracing the history of the Munda's self representation of their identity and community. Scholars have argued that these categories represent different historical contexts, histories, and legacies, both colonial and post-colonial. Various theorists have attempted to explain the history of the terminologies and their relationship to their land. They have used essentialist, non-essentialist, strategic non-essentialist theories/approaches to understand this history. I argue that they have all failed to adequately explain this relationship and these categories remain limited in their scope. Thus, I conclude that Adivasi Munda are caught in a politics of self-representation and representation by the Other, with the latter categorizations not representing the Adivasi Munda alterity.

MUNDA SELF-REPRESENTATION

Alpa Shah, an anthropologist studying Adivasi communities in Jharkhand, argues that the representation of the indigenous communities by the few, well-meaning foreign educated activists is generally detrimental to the Munda Adivasi community in their attempts to represent them to the larger world. She argues their use of essentialized frameworks of the Adivasi as simple forest dwellers romantically inhabiting their forests have pushed them into isolation and poverty, therefore further marginalizing them. I generally agree with her observation that the use of these essentialized stereotypes misrepresent the community by ignoring what I call their "Adivasi becoming", the multiple subjectivities they inhabit in relation to a larger world. However, I argue that Shah's work ignores not just the factual reality that the Adivasi Munda living in the rural area of the Chota Nagpur region have represented themselves for centuries, regardless of activists' recent attempts to hegemonize this process. She also fails to take into account the rich history of the resistance in which they have participated, predating the British period and through to the present day against those they think of as dikus (outsiders). Shah's argument thus is lacking as she anchors her entire conceptual framework is premised on a few activists and on their worldview.

Kaushik Ghosh argues similarly that that the urban-educated, self-proclaimed activist representing the Adivasi at international organizations like the United Nations do not truly represent the Adivasi communities because they create a false imagery of Adivasi identity and community, leading to false self-representations by Adivasis themselves (Ghosh, 2006). Thus he advocates for the Munda Adivasi community based in the rural areas to truly understand the Munda self representation. The problematic part of Kaushik's work is that his primary interlocutor is not just an activist based in the rural area, but is also a "chief of the community," a powerful position; he is not just a male patriarch but also someone who is viewed by Mundas

as versed in the Diku (outsiders) ways of communication and worldly transactions. Even though he acknowledges the importance of hearing rural Munda voices, Ghosh still relies on privileging a few select voices and using them to represent the totality of Munda identity and alterity.

Shah's and Kaushik's ethnographies and conclusions are limited in their representation of the Adivasi self and the Adivasi worldview. This is mainly due to two reasons: (a) they both anchor their conclusions and analysis of Munda identity and their connection to their land on a minority of indigeneious rights activists who do not fully represent the Adivasi Munda community; (b) they both treat the Munda Adivasi community as a monolithic group. This last point is important because too often scholarly and popular accounts of Adivasis represent them as uniform, and same, all thinking the same way. However, this ignores the inherent diversity of the Munda community: consisting of men and women, educated and uneducated, English and Hindi speaking, and those who only speak Mundari, they are Christian and non-Christan, and finally, they inhabit a wide range of socio-economic statuses. All of these attributes, as I will discuss throughout this dissertation, shape and construct different aspects of the community members' representations of themselves. However, the one thing that is common among them is all of them is their shared communal lands.

I argue that both Adivasi women and men living in the Chota Nagpur region create Munda Adivasi alterity as they confront the neoliberal state. These women and men are active political agents. Their political agency can be best understood in the everyday choices they make, which my ethnography of the everyday is attuned to observing and analyzing. For instance, in my field research I found that Adivasi Munda women who were the heads of the households living in the villages made the same socio, economic, and political decisions as

their husbands had migrated. They were not just taking on household chores and children, they were also working in the fields, taking care of their cattles, and carrying out economic activities in the market by selling their produce. (Refer to Figure 10- An Adivasi Munda Women Going To The Weekly Market To Buy Food) I will explore more fully to best understand the question of Munda representation, it is critical that women's voices are heard as clearly as men, the subaltern within a larger subaltern community.

THE ONTOLOGY OF THE MUNDA IDENTITY

I asked Balbir Munda, an old friend and a middle-aged man from the Siladon Village,"What on earth will you do with so much land and so many trees?"He smiled and said to me: "The way fish cannot live without water, Munda cannot live without his forest and land."

Balbir Munda, a community member in Khunti, pointed out an ontological question of inquiry for me, namely whether the Munda exist without inhabiting their land and forest? And how does this identity change for them when they migrate outside for their work or marry a non-Munda? What is the substance of Munda identity?

Shah's ethnography demonstrates that various aspects of the use of the "indigeneity" framework are flawed. In attempting to do so, she juxtaposes the concept of indigeneity with everyday Munda life and cultural practices. For instance, she claims that Munda villagers, if given a choice, would prefer to clear the trees and forest around them, as they attract meandering animals that destroy their mud houses and crops and keep them isolated from the rest of the nation-state. However, she ignores primary government reports that demonstrate these wild animals are displaced due to massive deforestation because of the "forest mafia" and development projects that need large patches of land (The Report of the Elephant Task

Force Ministry of Environment and Forests, 2010). In other words, it is not the Mundas' location that is the problem but the State's and corporations' actions towards them. However, what is most critical here is that she misses the point that Mundas use forest products like wood, herbs, and vegetables for their everyday life. Without the forests, their everyday lives would disappear. In addition, various cultural practices and festivals revolve around their forests and land, reflected in their music, dance and other cultural practices. Without their forests and lands, large parts of their culture would literally disappear.

She further argues that Adivasis who find work in brick kilns far from home or on farms as seasonal laborers generally find it a liberating experience, away from conservative village life that sanctions alcohol use and sex. Her understanding is problematic as the seasonal migration in the region is actually a form of distress migration because of droughts in the region; these Adivasi return back to their own lands during monsoon for cultivation. These are not examples of liberation, but of economic distress and lack of choice. In addition, she misses the critical issue of labor conditions that are inhuman, with city slums often plagued with a scarcity of space and diseases. For example, during my fieldwork, I personally witnessed the deaths of two family members who migrated to an urban town to seek treatment for malaria which had devastated their families in the village. I argue that Shah's ethnographic inquiry and critiques of "indigeneity" do not authentically represent the Adivasi Munda reality of life and perceptions of the world. What is problematic here is that Shah completely associates the idigenious identity with "poverty" and a "life of drudgery", but fails to explain the rationale for the choice that Munda Adivasi are making of living with their land and forest. The rationale of Adivasi agency is missing from Shah's work. She fails to paint an accurately complicated

picture of Adivasi agency in which they actively make choices and are not just the passive receivers of what they are being told by the activist.

In contradiction to Shah, Ghosh's ideas about "indigeneity" are much more open. He argues against an essentialized identity, that the Munda Adivasi are much more than just their land. He argues that the Adivasi have been actively engaging in politics with the hegemonic Indian State and have consistently engaged in acts and movements of resistance for maintaining their sovereignty over their land and territory; today it is resistance against a neoliberal Indian State. For Ghosh, " the most important resistance to neoliberal capitalism has emerged around land struggles, including a large number of adivasi ones, which have been facilitated by the tradition of movements against land-dispossession in the last three decades, a tradition which is overwhelmingly adivasi in location, content and characterization." To a large extent, we agree that a large part of Munda identity is constructed through resistance toward land dispossession by dikus (outsiders).

While I argue that Ghosh's questions about the framework of indigeneity remain relevant: "How might the fertility or potency of thinking and knowing through (i.e., by means of) the indigenous be appreciated? This is the crux of the matter" (Ghosh, 2010). His openness to questioning how Adivasi subjectivity is constructed by both Adivasi forms of being and becoming is a vital question for Adivasi Studies. I argue that he gave us a pertinent question, but unfortunately not the answer for it. It is unclear for Ghosh what counts as "Munda" and what their relationship with the forest and land actually "is". These are among the key issues I explore in this dissertation.

THE INVISIBLE CATEGORY OF THE MUNDA ADIVASI WOMEN
So far the scholarship has generally treated all the Munda Adivasi as one monolithic category. If women have found mention in the scholarship, they have largely remained like

the side actors, not equal partners in the creation of the Munda identity with their land. These dominant scholars have completely ignored the half of the Munda Adivasi population by not recognizing and acknowledging their presence to Adivasi self-representation.

I argue the lack of scholarship and understanding of Adivasi women as a category is attributed primarily because the western frameworks of feminism often see these women as victims: first as Adivasi and then as women. I find this problematic as, (a) we do not acknowledge the presence of these women in fighting in every movement or movement of Adivasi resistance and (b) we assume that only the acts of participating in the Gram Sabha are political, not the sites where women labor and live everyday, like the kitchen and fields.

I argue that these women use their knowledge as both Adivasi and women to confront the Neoliberal State. Ghosh and Shah both have mentioned in their work about the migratory patterns among the Munda community as they go out of their village to seek casual labor. However, they have failed to acknowledge the role of the women after they migrate for several months. These women, by choice or not, are the female heads of the household when their husbands, fathers, and brothers migrate. I argue the act of choosing what seeds to grow in their field, what vegetables to cook, and which party to vote for during the election time are all political choices they make and thus are active agents in creating Munda identity. For instance, Scholars (Shah, 2006) find connections between the Adivasi way of living and locally made alcohol Hadiya (rice beer) and *Mahuwaa* drink (alcohol made of *Mahuwaa* flowers). These beverages remain a crucial part of the Adivasi identity, festivities and culture. I agree with the scholarship on this but what is missing is what these locally-made Alcohols mean for these women? During my field study, I found that these women actively opposed consumption and production of Hadiya and *Mahuwaa* drink in their village and compelled the Gram Sabha to

penalize whosoever did so. Their rationale was that if alcohol is available in the immediate vicinity, men world drink more and this would lead to more domestic violence.[1]

Shah and Ghosh both have completely ignored the perspective of women in understanding Munda Adivasi identity. The gendered perspective of indigeneity thus is missing from the scholarship this leads mainly to three things: (a) making these Adivasi Munda women a completely invisible category and further adds to silencing them' (b) by not acknowledging these Munda Adivasi women and sharing with their land and forest, we assume them to be passive victims of patriarchy and capitalism; finally, (c) this also creates an incomplete distorted understanding of the questions of indigeneity. My dissertation research partially engages in understanding the category of the Munda Adivasi woman and the meaning of land and forest for them.

WHAT ARE WE MISSING?

What is missing from the anthropological debate on "indigenous peoples" is the potential contribution for highlighting the relevance of truly "indigenous" concepts, for example, of land ownership, or of subalternity and alterity. Calling for an end to the conceptual debate, Pathy (1992) argues that the concepts are nothing but constructs shaped largely by contemporary power structures and current dialogues of academics. For him, such debates only lead to acrimony and so provide little room for resolution of the problem.

Thus I agree that the question of categorization of Adivasi identity, between essentialist or non-essentialist frameworks, is not the most important question. Rather, the primary question here is how the Adivasi Munda represent themselves. One way that could give us an

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[1] These women also occasionally consumed alcohol during festivities. They simply advocated for moderate consumption of alcohol.

answer is to look at how communities use the terms themselves. In my own experience working in the Central and Eastern States, the term "indiginous" is used only by educated tribal and non-tribal populations for communicating to foreign audiences and international organizations. Both "tribal" and "Adivasi" terms are used by these communities in India to describe themselves or assert their Rights or claims for sovereignty over land and forest. The communities such as the "Ho," "Munda,' and, "Santhal" living in Central and Eastern India use "Adivasi" while the tribes living in the Northeastern parts of the country prefer "tribe" over "adivasi." "Adivasi" is a Sanskrit word meaning "original inhabitants of a given place" (Karlson and Subba, 2013). Sanjay Basu Mullick notes the term was originally mobilized by Adivasi sympathizers during the formation of the Jharkhand Maha Sabha in 1938 (Mullick, 1992). Thus the term, as a communal identity, joins together a history of subjugation by the dikus with a strong history of resistance. The fact that this term is conceptualized by these communities as the correct one means scholars should also use it in their analyses.

The history of the terminology has its roots in the Munda historical narrative of a "glorious" history of resistance and communal identity in the Chota Nagpur region against the Colonial Raj. This narrative of a history of resistance is intertwined with the history of subjugation experienced at the hands of Dikus (outsiders), British and Hindu. During the Colonial Raj, the influx of traders, Hindu *Zamindars* (Landlords) who had established themselves under the protection of the colonial authorities, took advantage of the imported British judicial system and made repeated attempts to subjugate Adivasis by alienating them from their lands and forest. This culminated in resistance against the British officials and Hindu *Zamindars* by many Adivasi communities, resulting in the formation of an "us versus them" for Adivasis between themselves and dikus. In this context, the formation of communal identity

as an Adivasi, partially identified as simply, "not Diku" was solidified. This means that the Adivasi consciousness is at least part of a result of historical communal identity formation.

Amita Baviskar argues that "Adivasi" terminology has been internalized by the communities (Baviskar, 2013). Over a period of time, communities such as the Munda have internalized this term and attached meanings to it based on shared experiences and history. As Baviskar describes, "Adivasi" is a "social fact" in India and often used by communities for their political advantage. Some scholars have argued that the Adivasi terminology is an essentialist concept and does not represent the true reality of these communities . I argue this contradiction is crucial to understanding and defining the category of Adivasi. In this regard the history of Adivasi resistance and subjugation which underlines the Adivasi consciousness and their politics is crucial.

The Adivasi communities in India share multiple subjectivities based on their relationship with land, forest, and the various State and corporate actors. They actively mediate and interpret their everyday lives and practices in the context of their identity as subalterns. I argue that the term "Adivasi" is much more decolonial in nature. It also helps us to understand both Adivasi beings, as well as becoming, in the face of a changing socio-economic context, and enhances our knowledge about Adivasi Munda politics in relation to their land and forest.

 I argue that both Adivasi "being" and "becoming" are intertwined with each other and so must be analyzed together. I argue that the Adivasi constantly interpret and create Adivasi alterity premised on essentialized notions of Adivasi being as they negotiate with the neoliberal State through the multiple forms of subjectivities and, in turn, shape their becoming. The focus of this dissertation is to understand Adivasi being and becoming by analyzing their response

to the neoliberal State's incursions onto their land and into their jungles. I discuss the politics of creation of the Adivasi being and becoming in my dissertation.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

This project is an ethnographic study of Munda everyday life which seeks to understand and explicate the meanings of land and forest for themselves, and how those meanings shape contemporary Adivasi politics as they confront the Neoliberal State. More specifically, this research project analyzes the politics of the creation of Adivasi representation by analyzing the community's politics through the essentialist notions of land and forest for the Adivasi community and how these meanings feed into the Adivasi politics of becoming as they navigate the current socio-political cultural milieu.

How can one understand the questions of Adivasi being and becoming? I argue that decolonizing methodological framework as advocated by the term "Adivasi" (1) helps to reconstruct this community's political foundation of being Adivasi; and, (2) gives a methodological framework for interpreting Adivasi politics as a matter of negotiations with the political realities of the contemporary Indian State

What kind of research is needed to understand the relationship between these concepts and political resistance? Baviskar and Sundar highlight the primacy of understanding the complex conditions of everyday life of those engaged in violent and non-violent political resistance. Participant observation is an ideal way to investigate the shared meanings generated in these processes and to understand how they inform particular ways of being and acting Adivasi. "In every society people make constant use of these complex-meaning systems to organize their behavior, to understand themselves and others, and to make sense out of the world in which they live. These systems of meaning constitute their culture..." (Spradly, 2016).

This research project focuses on understanding cultural knowledge embedded in everyday life of people with the multifaceted relationship with the land they inhabit. For instance, Munda community members exercise political agency at different scales in attempting to maintain tradition.

It is important here to note that my intellectual position for this project is decolonial but my methodological position remains postcolonial. This leads me to my Methodological position.

I had to consider the method and methodology of doing this dissertation that will best represent Adivasi and acknowledge Adivasi self representation. But the methodological concern over here is, "Can the subaltern speak?" the question posed by Gayatri C. Spivak. Spivak pushes us to be wary of our intellectual positions as we conduct our inquiry of the subaltern subject since the position can close or open a space for the subaltern to be ignored, or heard (Spivak, 1985). Thus, in this situation as an outsider studying the subaltern Adivasi subject, it is important not just to be mindful of your own position as an outsider, but also be open to listening to the subaltern voice. How can we do this as we are conditioned to understand subaltern subjectivities through a very eurocentric and western epistemological framework?

Spivak gives at least one part of the answer by framing the concern as an issue of ethics, which she conceptualizes as responsibility by the researcher when trying to represent the Subaltern to the rest of the world, and to themselves. This act of responsibility is a call from Spivak to address the transaction between the listener and speaker. She argues that, in this act, the researcher is responsible for making space for the Other to exist. If the researcher is not both cautious and conscious of the subaltern subject's positionality, as well as her own, can lead to epistemological violence, in which an individual or community's knowledge about

the world is ignored, dismissed, or framed as "backwards" or "primitive." Thus it becomes imperative for this project to put Spivak's conceptualization of ethical responsibility at the forefront.

In this project, as I attempt to understand Adivasi being and becoming, as a graduate student studying in the United States, also coming from a middle upper class and caste in India, my positionality remained as an outsider, and a privileged one, in the field. To keep the subaltern Adivasi men and women voices alive in this project, I use Spivak's conceptualization as suggested in her work on French Feminism, of understanding women and men through their discourses and not putting western frameworks on them as a way of understanding their alterity and connection to the land. Spivak conceptualizes such a position as a position of hyper-reflexivity (Spivak, 1981).

This methodological positionality, of actively listening to the subaltern, must extend to all parts of a research project, including analyzing field data and writing. It is crucial in this context to be cautious of the distinction between giving voice to the subaltern versus keeping the subaltern voice alive. For this project I have attempted to keep the voice of the subaltern alive, not to insert any voice, not to ignore any voice, as I embarked on a journey of writing about the subaltern Adivasi subject and her alterity.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FIELD SITE AND METHODOLOGY

The town of Khunti is situated less than 60 miles from Jharkhand's capital city, Ranchi, within the undulating landscapes of degraded forests typical of this region, the Chota Nagpur Plateau. It is home to the Munda community, which constitutes about forty percent of the total population, around 40,000 people total (Census 2011). Ninety percent of Khunti district is considered rural, so the Munda community is dependent on subsistence agriculture and forest produce for their

livelihoods. They live in close harmony with their local environment and their festivals, rituals, and general culture revolve around their land and their immediate environment. It is a unique place to study the motivation of local communities like the Mundas, who have been engaging in resistance efforts to save their lands and environment. It also has a special place in Adivasi history in India, being the birthplace of one of the most popular Adivasi leaders in Indian history, Birsa Munda. Born in 1875, he spearheaded a movement against the colonial regime and promoted tribal identity.

Khunti has a long history of resistance against *dikus* (outsiders), starting in pre-colonial times, and running through India's post-Independence to today. Ongoing resistance efforts are aimed against neoliberal development projects like land mining and hydroelectricity dams; the most prominent among these is the Pathalgarhi movement, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Alongside this political struggle, there is a visible struggle by locals in their everyday lives for necessities like running water, electricity and medical facilities, in addition to high rates of malnourishment among children. This is despite the fact that the state government, NGOs and missionaries working in the region have poured in money under the name of curbing underdevelopment and escalating violence in the region. The region is currently experiencing a Maoist insurgency which started in late 1990's and has led to extreme human rights violations committed by both State and Maoist actors.

I conducted an ethnography of Munda everyday life to capture their engagement with the land and surrounding environment. The fieldwork lasted for a total of fifteen months over three years.   This included preliminary data collection during Summers 2015 and 2017. Findings from this preliminary study provided crucial data on the "everyday" Munda life for the dissertation research project study, including the use of recorded interviews of Munda community members

and observer participation. My primary ethnographic fieldwork ran from February 2018 December 2018.

I stayed with an Adivasi Munda Christian family in the Siladon village of Khunti region. This helped me to engage in and document their day-to-day farming tasks and household chores, along with their other routine activities, including land-use such as farming and harvest practices; collection and usage of forest products such as herbs and firewood; religious practices and festivals around agriculture practices like funerals, marriages and birth ceremonies; nature-centered songs and dance; and the weekly village meetings, the Gram Sabha. Since it was not possible for me to take detailed notes in the field, I instead took jotted notes including photographs, audio and or video recordings of public meetings, memos, objects from the field.

My previous experience in the area meant that I was somewhat familiar with local dynamics. I was doing research and advocacy work as an activist in issues of food and security and that drew my attention to this area in particular. My professional background prepared me well to conduct this study, data collection, and analysis. I have conducted research and advocacy work on the issues of food security from 2012-2014 with Munda community members. This work of mine familiarized me with Munda community culture and everyday life. In addition, I am well versed in Mundari and Hindi, languages spoken by the local population in the region. This reduced my dependence on translators and the likelihood of misinterpretations. This reflexive thought process has helped me to minimize the extent to which my own biases enter my work.

DESCRIPTION OF KHUNTI (FIELDSITE)

It was a hot sweltering summer day in June 2017, and I was heading to Khunti for my fieldwork. I was extremely tired; I had taken the local Jeep from Ranchi railway station. The vehicle was overcrowded with more than fifteen people squished together. The top roof of the

vehicle was also full of produce and hens. Before joining my doctoral program, I worked and stayed in Khunti from 2012-14 with several Munda communities.

On the way to Khunti, the massive trees and dense forests alongside the highway grabbed my attention; the land was breathtaking and beautiful. As we entered Khunti town, we came across a newly built Usha Martin University for Management Studies. It immediately caught my attention since it is a coal mining corporation and was involved in land grabbing in different regions in the State. Usha Martin had recently been subject to massive resistance by locals for the company's plans to mine coal.

Between the big old trees and green fields, we crossed a bridge. On one side of the bridge, I could see a creek and fields which the farmers were tilting with the oxen. On the other side was a large campus for the COBRA Battalion's Unit (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action), a section of the national government's paramilitary force, India. The COBRA Battalion is deployed to combat local insurgency issues dealing with Adivasis and Maoists. The location of the Battalion was at a very strategic position, right before you entered the town. And the name COBRA signified to scare people away. A few miles further down the road was a Hindu temple. This temple, the biggest in Khunti, was painted bright orange and golden, like any other Hindu temple, with a saffron flag on its top. Both the battalion and the temple marked not just the presence of the State and Hindu religion respectively, but also a marker of their power and hegemony in the region. Along with these actors, I also observed the presence of various Christian groups, the Church, and missionary run organizations like schools and NGOs. The question of under-representation of Adivasis in the area lingered in my head. What did it mean for the majority, Adivasi population that there were few markers of their identity, be it buildings, the architecture, or memorials?

As the Jeep arrived at the local market, I was greeted by a friend who was waiting for me at the bus stop. The local market is the main stop for all the buses and jeeps ferrying people from Ranchi. Next to the market, a police station sprawled over acres was located. As is usual, the stop was crowded with people and local eateries.

On my way to my friend's home, we stopped in front of the local German-Lutheran missionary school, the Ursuline School, due to a massive traffic jam. It was the end of the day and all the kids were running out of the school in their white and grey school uniforms. Girls had their braided hair tied with red ribbon. The school premises also contained a church, which was visible from outside. There were other missionary institutions in the region also. They all had crosses and statues of Christ and Mary outside. The neighbourhood my friend stayed in had several houses with a cross outside or scriptures from the Bible written on the walls. In this way, one could easily demarcate between the Christian Adivasi homes and nonChristian homes, both Adivasi and Hindu.

Khunti town has two additional main chowks (roundabout), which mark its main street. Both these chowks have statues of two Indian Independence freedom fighters: Subhash Chandra Bose and Bhagat Singh. As I looked at them, I wondered why the town did not have any statues of Adivasi leaders like Birsa Munda or the Jaipal Singh Munda. Around the whole town, the local administration had set up billboards and painted the walls of the government buildings to advertise the plethora of government programs available to serve the poor. The Government of India and international organizations have spent hundreds of millions of USD since Jharkhand independence in 2000 to curb the ongoing insurgency by targeting poverty and deprivation in the region. Many things had changed since I had last visited Khunti in 2014, including an increased paramilitary force, the number of Hindu temples and missionary churches, schools, NGO's, and government

offices. These changing landscapes are visual representations of the power struggles between several organizations and presented a classic case of the Neoliberal development.

The stark inequality was not only in the landscape of Khunti town; one could observe it between the locals also. It was very easy to differentiate between the local Hindus (mostly Sedans) and the Adivasi. While Adivasis were mostly engaged in selling their local produce and daily wage work, local Hindus were mostly involved in running formal businesses. Most of the Adivasi locals came from the villages surrounding Khunti town to sell produce in the local market. (Refer to Figure 9- An Adivasi Munda Woman Selling Bay Leaves)They often carried small amounts of these produce and sat near the roadside to sell. One can also observe Adivasi men standing in large groups every morning for any work available, with their tools at the ready Local Adivasis often worked in the local restaurants, eateries, and shops owned by the local Hindus. One could also observe the Adivasi Munda children attending government and missionary-run schools and colleges. The local Munda Adivasi interacted with each other in their native language, Mundari. They were generally not fluent in Hindi but made an effort to speak it with the local Hindus including the government officer as they generally do not speak or understand Mundari. For example, the women in the village often lamented that during financial transactions with the local middle men and women, they were often deceived as they could not fully understand Hindi.

THE VILLAGE
The villages in the Khunti district present a completely contrasting picture from the Khunti town. Khunti was 90 percent rural and inhabited by the Munda Adivasi population. Munda Adivasi villages are surrounded by large dense forests. Most of these forests are a part of the Munda Khatkhati land and so, legally, were communally governed. The villagers traveled mostly on foot, cycles, and local auto rickshaws. In one entire village, perhaps only 2-3 families owned motorbikes. The State development of infrastructure has been rapid since Independence in 2000,

primarily in the form of roads built in the region. The villagers always questioned the new roads built in the region as several old trees which served generations of their ancestors had been cut down for this purpose. On the other hand, the schools and the local government offices like the panchayat bhawan (centralized office for panchayats in the region) and the *aaganwadi (*state-run nursery), both run by the government, were in debilitated physical condition. (Refer to Figure 5 School Building, Remata Village, Khunti) These buildings contained broken, old, or no furniture for the students. These schools were often short-staffed, sometimes with as little as one teacher covering 2-3 classes in one classroom. These regions also had a strong CRPF (national paramilitary) presence. One could almost always see these CRPF Jawans (soldiers) patrolling in the region. In some instances, they occupied the school to establish their base camps.[2]

Inside these villages, the inhabitants live in mud houses whereas most of the missionary-run organization offices, schools, and churches are made of more durable materials, like concrete, bricks, and stones. The church was often full of locals on Sunday for weekly mass. These villagers practice subsistence agriculture and so are dependent on the forest for food, herbs, and livelihood. Villagers also rear animals like goats, sheep, ducks, pigs, hens, and hens. The region's economic activities were most visible in the weekly market where the locals sold and bought local produce, ate in the local eateries, and enjoyed locally-produced alcohol.

Early Thursday mornings generally mean weekly Gram Sabha meetings for most villagers, the system of self-governance they employed. During my entire stay and work in the region, I regularly attended Gram Sabha meetings. The Gram Sabha, and other public events, like communal celebrations, took place in one designated place in the village. This place has a tamarind

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[2] Prior to my fieldwork, I had investigated a few cases of the CRPF, in 2012, stealing funds and food meant for local children, reporting this to the district administration.

tree and is named Aakhra, a common site for most Munda villages. I also noticed that many of these Munda villages also had Pathalgarhi stones, generally used to mark the village boundary and more recently, featured at the center of the Pathalgarhi Movement, which I will discuss in-depth in Chapter 2.

During these Gram Sabha meetings, villagers discussed and resolved local disputes between neighbors, discussed new government proposals, put together strategies to combat neoliberal development, monitored forest and sand mafias, made political decisions of whom to support in the elections, they also resolved land and cattle disputes among the villagers. As I will show in later chapters, the Gram Sabha was treated with the utmost importance by villagers, who viewed it as an important mechanism of their political agency. These meetings were regularly attended by at least one member to represent each family. In most of the villages, women were not allowed to attend the meeting, which draws criticism by scholars and activists and which I will address more specifically in Chapter 4. Further, the Gram Sabha system of self-governance is also at least formally recognized by Schedule V of the Indian Constitution, meaning it is both an Adivasi-adopted form and one recognized by dikus (outsiders).

IRB APPROVAL

IRB approval was granted via expedited review on June 27, 2017 to conduct pre-dissertation fieldwork research for this study. Approval was granted to audio record the interviews of activists working with Munda communities. After the dissertation proposal has been approved by my committee, I revised the IRB submission as needed following the approval of my dissertation proposal to indicate that the study has moved beyond the pilot interview phase and to take into account any changes that my committee recommends.

1.4 CHAPTER OUTLINE

Overall, this project is an ethnographic study of Munda everyday life that seeks to understand and explicate the community's meanings of land and forest , and how those meanings shape their contemporary politics as they resist the neoliberal State. More specifically, I analyze the politics involved in Adivasi self-representation by observing and analyzing the community's discourses and imaginaries through particular ontological and epistemological relationships with the land and forest they inhabit. I hope this work contributes to greater understanding of the complexities involved in land politics and indigenous communities in postcolonial societies in a wide range of disciplines.

In Chapter 2, I explore the history of the State of Jharkhand, through to the present-day Pathalgarhi Movement. I will argue that the Pathalgarhi movement represents the contemporary form of negotiations between members who claim Adivasi identity and the Indian State, one which simultaneously asserts their rights as citizens of the Indian state as well as autonomous, subaltern communities. In this context, I argue that the Munda communities are continuing their history of creating their own form of Adivasi politics that contrasts with the colonial concepts of Adivasi-ness as a binary one.

In Chapter 3, I explore how Munda communities inhabit a rapidly changing, neoliberal environment today. Since 1991, neoliberalism has led to the rise of corporate power and environmental destruction, under the watchful eye of the State. In Jharkhand, this has meant increased conflict with mining companies, local State administration, and the national government's paramilitary forces. I discuss various strategies used by the Mundas in dealing with these actors as they interpret and practice their Munda alterity. I conclude by arguing that Munda forms of alterity like their unique relationship with their immediate natural environments, and that

the use of institutions like the *Gram Sabha* (Village Council) remain bulwarks against neoliberal, State, and corporate forces.

In chapter 4, I discuss a very unexplored aspect of Munda alterity, namely the role of gender and women's practices in everyday life. Gender as a primary focus of analysis is nearly absent in Adivasi scholarship. Too often, Adivasi women are subsumed under representations by outsiders as simply passive and oppressed by patriarchy and capitalist forces. I show how the questions of sustenance and property rights, usually treated solely as "women's issues" are actually "Adivasi women's issues." I demonstrate this through a detailed ethnography of food security practices as understood and practiced by these women in their kitchen and field spaces as they confront the Neoliberal State by consciously crafting a gendered Munda Adivasi alterity. I conclude by arguing that rather than being just a simple victim of tribal patriarchy and the State, Munda women are active political agents who co-construct the meaning of land, jungles, and political resistance.

In Chapter 5, I conclude, first, that Munda Adivasi alterity cannot be understood within the frameworks of "indigenious" and "tribe" as these are "fixed" and "essentialized" categories; second, that Munda subjectivity is constantly in flux as the Munda community mediates multiple forms of Adivasi epistemology and ontology while negotiating with State and corporate actors; third, that Adivasi studies should critically engage with and include Adivasi woman's alterity to fully understand and address the questions of the entire community's politics; finally, I argue that ethnography should utilize post colonial frameworks and methodologies and should be focused on understanding the Subaltern communities through their discourses instead of western, neoliberal, or other "Diku" epistemological frameworks

2   CHAPTER 2: PATHALGARHI MOVEMENT

I was in Khunti town; it was an oppressively hot summer morning in April 2018. There had been no electricity most of the night at my place, and around six in the morning, my phone rang. It was Mangra Munda, a local villager and a friend from Koenara village. He called me to ask if I would be interested in attending a Pathalgarhi meeting at 11 that morning in Hakkaduba village. Later, we met near the police station at Khunti *chowk*, and took an auto-rickshaw along with some other folks. The rickshaw had more people than it could carry; some villagers were hanging off the sides, and some were standing on the external footrest. The women villagers in the rickshaw were donned in red and white *sarees*, while the men were wearing white *kurtas* with red and white scarves. The colors white and red are a symbol of Adivasi solidarity and resistance. Striking up a conversation with one of the women, I asked her if she was headed to Siladon for the Pathalgarhi meeting. She nodded her head to confirm yes and quickly turned away her face to avoid answering any further questions.

On the cramped ride to Hakkaduba, I saw several local people walking towards the meeting location, dressed in white and red with bows slung over their backs, and various farming tools in their hands. From far, these bows and arrows looked like a big gun (like AK-47) but looking up close they had only been decorated in a manner that they appear to look like a gun. For me, it represented a show of power in front of the local Hindu administration of Khunti. Mothers had their children swaddled in cloth and dangling from their backs, while also carrying coconut, saal tree leaves, flowers, plates and urns made of copper. About two miles away from the meeting location, there was a small congregation of three or four police officers and paramilitary personnel; however, there was no presence of any police or local administration the Closer We Got To Our Destination. The Road Ended Near A Green Colored Stone Covered With A White Cloth That

Was Standing In The Midst Of The Panchayat. (Refer to Figure 3: Provisions Of Constitution Of India Carved On A Pathalgarhi Stone Near The Stone), People Had Gathered In The Thousands. Men And Women, All Dressed In White And Red, Were Sitting On The Dusty Ground In Separate Rows. Not Far From The Large Stone, Was An Elevated Stage Set Up With Microphones, A Loudspeaker And A Few Chairs For The Dignitaries Attending. There Were No Women Sitting On The Elevated Stage. The program was very well arranged with many of the organizers serving as volunteers.

As soon as we reached the venue of the meeting, Mangra introduced me to his friend Somari, who was the resident of the village. Somari was the student of history and was studying at Khunti college. Mangra asked me to stay with Somari as it was very crowded and he made sure that we got seated on the ground in the area where women were sitting. There were many women and children around us. It was very hot. The program started after a further two hours. Everyone was eagerly waiting to see Yusuf Purti, one of the main faces and leader of the Pathalgarhi movement in Khunti. Yusuf came in a Jeep with 10-12 men and women. While walking, he was at all times surrounded by 10-15 Munda men and women who had formed a circle around him to protect him from any police officials. There were no pending cases against him at that time but Adivasi Munda felt that he might be falsely implicated in a frivolous case and arrested by the local administration and police officials. By this time, the Pathalgarhi movement had gained much attention both in local and national media. Many local journalists with their cameras and microphones were also present at the venue. I could also spot some foreigners and students from outside the region at the event as well.

Yusuf Purti was in his mid 40's. He had a dark complexion and had a fairly small frame. I had recently learned that he has a Ph.D. from Ranchi University in Sociology and was teaching as

a faculty member at Torpa College in Khunti. The program started with the inaugural ceremony. Purti and other leaders cut the ribbon to unveil the erected Pathalgarhi stone. As soon as the ribbon was cut, the Shaman of the Hakkaduba village started his prayers and used Saal leaves and water to complete the ceremony. After prayers were offered, Adivasi women made a circle around the stone and started dancing around it, while musicians around them played *Mander* (Munda traditional drum). As they sang their songs and danced on the beats of the *Mander*, other men also joined them and made another circle, dancing and singing with them. Together, these Munda rituals, prayers and dance, were meant to bless the stone. As soon as the singing and dancing was over, journalists gathered around Purti to interview him. He asked them to wait until the end of the meeting to interview him.

The green Pathalgarhi stones set up outside various villages have inscribed on them, in Hindi, the provisions of the Constitution of India applicable to the designated Fifth Schedule areas of the State of India. The Constitution of India makes special provision of Fifth Schedule Areas, where tribals are predominantly in majority. In these Scheduled Areas tribals are entitled to self govern themselves through Gram Sabha based upon their local customs and practices.

According to The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (1996), popularly known as PESA Act, *gram sabhas* have a decisive say in many matters, and the local administration then has to go by the decision of the gram sabha. All these provisions of the Constitution were written in Hindi (not in Mundari, the language of the Mundas). So, it was clear that it was not so much for the Munda community but for the outsiders coming to encroach over Adivasi land and forest. It was also a reminder to the state that the communal local governance structures (the *Gram Sabhas*) are supreme and powerful in these regions, and they cannot be

governed by national laws. (Refer to figure 3: Provisions Of Constitution Of India Carved On A Pathalgarhi Stone).

Soon, Purti, along with other leaders, took the stage. After a 20 minute introduction by the Gram Pradhan of the Hakkaduba village, Purti came to speak. His entire speech was in Mundari, not Hindi. His speech specifically focused on addressing the mass gathering of locals who were mostly Mundas. (refer to Figure 1: People Gathered For Pathalgarhi Meeting) He started his speech by raising the popular slogan of the Munda struggle for resistance, "*Abuadeshum Abuaraj!* (My country, my rule.)" This slogan was coined by Birsa Munda, the Munda leader and icon from the early 1900's, who successfully resisted against the local Hindu landlords and the British to defend Muda lands. It was the success of the Birsa Munda movement that the Mundas were successful in forcing British to pass customary laws protecting the tribal land from non tribal populations.

As Purti raised the slogan, the public cheered him and the environment of the meeting became very jubilant. Yusuf was a confident and fluent speaker. He announced "We invited the District Collector, the local official, for this event but he has declined our invitation." He then added, "He is scared to come to the event. If he participated in the event he would have to answer our questions." After a pause, he said, "As you all know, these *Dikus* do not want to have answers to tell us for the years of exploitation and plundering of the resources." His speech had elaborate details of the constitutional provisions, which gave special status to tribals and protected the Adivasi land from non-Adivasis. He added, "If we want to empower ourselves, we need to fight for our rights. No one can empower us, we will have to stand up for ourselves, our ancestors, and fight for our rights. This is the only way we can defend ourselves and our lands."

The central demand of the Pathalgari movement is to have autonomy over the land through evoking the Constitution of India that recognizes the self-governance system of tribals, the *Gram Sabha* and its powers. The Pathalgarhi movement also emphasizes primacy of Adivasi customs and practices in formulation of development policies for Adivasis. It spoke of Adivasi-centric development which prioritizes education, health, and well-being for Adivasis. Towards the end of his speech, Purti raised the slogan, *"Na Jaan, Na Zameen Denge"* ("We will neither give our life, nor our lands)" and concluded by saying that, "we need to protect our lands from the Government and the multinational corporations. This is the land of our ancestors who have given their blood to protect these forest forests from the Diku Raj. Now we need to protect our lands for our existence and for children and their future." To give some context, the current estimate is that there are 70-80 villages in the Khunti region currently participating in the movement.

This is not the first time Munda Adivasis have organized themselves. They had organized themselves several times historically. *However, what was different this time was that they are talking to the State in its own language by inscribing the relevant constitutional provisions enshrined for the Adivasis on their Pathalgarhi stones in Hindi to remind the State of its obligations to these communities.*

The sense of resistance in defending their land against outsiders dates back to pre-colonial times and emerges from a strong underlying Munda consciousness. This Munda consciousness and the Munda imaginary of the world emerges from the dual, entangled histories of Munda Adivasi Oppression and Resistance against outsiders, both in colonial, and postcolonial eras. Recognizing these histories and the consciousness and imaginaries that result from the Munda relationship with the State as the "Other" gives us greater insight into why it

is that the Munda Adivasi continue to fight for their land rights. Munda Adivasi, as a subaltern community, have refused to accept their subordinate position as "subalterns," and have asserted themselves as rightful citizens of the State. This refusal to accept their subalternity, and the subordination imposed on them by outsiders, are important parts of Adivasi consciousness and contemporary Adivasi imaginaries. The Pathalgarhi movement represents the changing nature of the Adivasi-State relationship.

Previously, Adivasi scholarship has generally focused on framing Adivasi politics and resistance as originating solely in opposition to the State (Kumbamu, 2017). I argue that Adivasi politics and resistance should not be discussed simply in opposition to the State; rather, their resistance is also the result of their political and economic marginalization, which in turn has transformed the Adivasi into a sovereign community capable of asserting its rights. The relationship of the Adivasi with the State is one that involves both oppression and resistance. The key elements underlying this relationship are claims to citizenship and land rights. The Adivasi have a long history of fighting for their citizenship rights while also using claims to citizenship to advocate for access to health, employment and education and other human development issues. This history dates back to colonial and postcolonial era state-tribe politics, which informs contemporary Adivasi-led social movements, such as the Pathalghari movement.

This chapter is based on oral history of the interviews conducted with leaders and participants in the Pathalgari movement, and also based on participant observation of in Pathalgari meetings and visits to the villages that were a part of the Pathalgarhi movement.

Following the Pathalgarhi movement meeting at the Hakkaduba village, I was left with several questions lingering in my head. For me it was really important to understand why the Pathalgarhi movement chose to invoke the traditional Pathalgarhi practice to assert their contemporary political, economic, and development rights. Why do they choose to write the constitutional provisions on the Pathalgarhi stones? How do they envision their relationship with the Indian State? And most importantly what was their motivation to defend their land? To understand all these questions, I decided to interview Yusuf Purti to understand the movement better.

It was early in the morning as my friend Jyotika and I drove on my scooter to Udburu village in Khunti. Udburu was a part of the Pathalgarhi movement and Purti resided there. This was not my first visit to Udburu. I had visited the village and the nearby area quite regularly in previous years while working with the community on the issues of food insecurity. My friend Jyotika was also a well-respected journalist in the region. She was not only a Munda but also a female journalist. She had managed to put me in contact with Purti, and recommended me, so he had agreed to meet me.

As we reached the village, we decided to park our scooter just outside its border. At the entrance to the village, a large stone had been erected as a marker of the Pathalgarhi movement. We went inside the village and decided to wait under the tamarind tree of the village (every Munda village has a tamarind tree where traditional gram sabha meetings and festivities take place). The village looked like any other Munda Adivasi Village, with mud huts in a row, and dense green trees scattered here and there. As we sat under the tamarind tree, we were aware that the villagers would observe us closely for sometime before anyone in the village would come and talk to us. This was not the first time this had happened to me, earlier I faced similar situations. Before

interacting or making friends with any outsider, the Mundas would observe and scrutinize them. I knew that the people of the village and Pathalgarhi leaders were most fearful of the police or state officers coming into the village and capturing Purti and other leaders. After some time, two men dressed in casual clothes and flip flops were seen walking towards us. They asked us our purpose of visiting the village. We told them we were there to meet Yusuf Purti. They asked us to wait and said they will get back to us soon. Right after, we noticed that people were starting to move around pretending to do their work, but actually observing us. After a few more minutes, a man rang a bell with a wooden block. This was a way to say everything was safe for Purti and other Pathalgarhi activists to come out. As Purti and others came into view, he got a sheet to spread on the ground for everyone to sit on. He greeted everyone and we all sat together on the sheet on the ground. People in the village offered us water to drink. Our conversation began after that.

Yusuf: How have you been? How is your Ph.D. coming along? And what is the topic of your study? I am glad some Ph.D. scholars are interested in the Pathalgarhi movement.

Pallavi: I smiled and said, "My Ph.D. research is going fine. I am here to understand the Pathalgarhi movement. I attended your meeting in the Hakkaduba village. There are various questions that I have for you today."

Yusuf: "I am happy to answer. I was once a Ph.D. scholar and I understand it's not an easy process. But I want to make sure that whatever we discuss today should not be manipulated or changed? Many media professionals who have recently covered the Pathalgarhi movement or taken my interview have manipulated the details and have portrayed us as 'anti national'."

Pallavi: I jokingly said, "Being 'anti-national' means you are doing good work. Everyone the government feels threatened by is termed as 'anti-national' or 'urban naxal' these days."

To make sure I did not take up much time as he was a busy man and had other commitments, I quickly took out my notebook to ask the questions that I had prepared. Since I did not want to make him uncomfortable by using my camera or audio recorded, since he was under surveillance by local authorities. I must admit these were among the few moments of the field work I was very tense, as anyone from outside the region of Khunti was also closely surveilled and scrutinized by the government officials. I made sure that I did not express my anxiety and show my nervousness in front of him and quickly started the interview.

Pallavi: "Why did you all start Pathalgarhi? What is the message that you are trying to give the Government of Jharkhand?"

Yusuf cleared his throat and stood straight and asked someone standing by his side to get his books. He then proceeded to respond to my questions.

Yusuf: "Pallavi, as we all know very well what happened after Jharkhand got independent. After years of struggle of Munda Adivasi, where we put our blood and sweat, our cause has gone to vain. After Jharkhand became a separate state and gained a new meaning, the ruling parties/government in Jharkhand have tried in different ways to displace adivasi from their lands for the corporations."

"The Government of Jharkhand has failed to provide us with very basic entitlements for survival like schools for their children, health clinics, food entitlements, and employment. After Jharkhand got independent, we thought we can attend schools, and we can farm on our land peacefully. But the formation of the separate state of Jharkhand has become a nightmare for us."

"Government of Jharkhand has made several attempts to grab Adivasi land. These attempts were both through constitutional and unconstitutional means in order to help big companies. As you know, in the summer of 2017, the government started a new 'land bank' policy in which it increased by 20 lakh acres the amount of land to be given away to mining companies in the emerging development landscape. Most of the land as noted by the officials was 'gair mazurwa' land (common land, including pastures and hills in the village). To ease the land transfer, the ruling BJP government tried to pass laws to remove the crucial aspects of the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (CNT), 1908 and Santhal Parganas Tenancy Act (SPT), 1949, that protects adivasi land against transfer to non-tribals. Additionally, a substantial size of the territory was also to be auctioned off to private development. All this information is available online."

He laughed and said, "You should check the land bank policy website. It says a 'single window system, one stop solution', for those corporations who are interested in setting up industries and lease mines in the area. All the land that the website shows is the one that belongs to us and we are currently living and farming on the land. Government believes in one click they can give away our land. If they fail to encroach over land they start labelling as Maoist and putting us in Jail. They employ tactics of violence to threaten us. In some cases they also try to break our unity by interfering in the Gram Sabha proceedings."

"All we are trying to do is respond to the oppression of the Jharkhand government. We are not doing anything unconstitutional' in fact what we are saying is very much part of the Constitution."

"The Pathalgarhi movement is advocating that Munda Adivasis need to take responsibility for their own development by invoking powers given to the Gram Sabha by the Constitution of India. *Gram Sabha is important for the empowerment of the Munda Adivasi communities. This simply means that the Gram Sabha represents traditional local self-governance and thus ought to be given power by the state to implement Munda-centric development."*

He then asked people who were sitting around us to get us some water to drink. He also asked if I was hungry and would like to eat something. I replied saying, "water would be good for now, maybe later we can try to have something." At this point, I was very confused about the way the stones in the Pathalgarhi were used. As I understood, these stones were a part of the larger cultural practice for the Munda everyday practices. Not many people outside the Munda community know about the practice of Pathalgarhi. Traditional Pathalgarhi stones have inscriptions in Mundari (language spoken by the Munda people) but the stones used in the Pathalgarhi movement had inscriptions written in Hindi.

Pallavi: "What is Pathalgarhi? How is the present Pathalgarhi movement different from the earlier practice of pathalgarhi?"

Yusuf: "I am sure since you have been in this region you must have seen many Pathalargi. This practice of the Pathalgarhi has been carried out from the time we didn't have any script of the Mundari. That's the reason you will find many Pathalgarhi stones which have no inscriptions. It was after the Church from Germany came and developed the script for Mundari we started writing details about our ancestors on the stones. Several Pathalgarhi stones of different villages bear witness to the presence of the Munda Adivasi region, which dates back a century. These Pathalgarhi are both sacred and political for the Munda Adivasi. They are a witness to our ancestors and the fight for our land against the dikus."

"Traditionally, Pathalgarhi refers to a ritual performed by the Munda Adivasi, as the last rites of a person who has died. (refer to figure 2: Traditional Pathalgarhi Stones (*Sasandhiri))*
Pathalgarhi can also be understood as "Sasandiri" in Mundari, the act of placing a stone at the tomb of a dead person. Pathalgarhi or Sasandiri is not just a part of traditions and rituals, it also serves as an important marker of lands and communal autonomy. This is also done in the memory of the ancestors to ensure that they would not be forgotten and was essentially a form of record keeping. Sasandiri or Pathalgari practice is documented in the book Encyclopedia Mundarica by Father Hoffman (1950)."

Yusuf opened the booklets he had and started showing me the details of the Pathalgarhi practice they outlined.

"The Pathalgarhi stones are used for various other practices. It is also used to mark the village territory in the Munda governance system between the villages of different Munda Clans. This was done by the tribals, not only for territorial demarcation of the village boundaries, but also for highlighting the system of self-governance which has existed for ages, such as drawing the impression of the family tree, a few big stones placed in some villages also

had the power and functions of the Gram Sabha carved on them. Each "Khunt" family, which often resides in a large village with many households of the same ancestry, has its own "sasandiri" that runs across several acres. We also have Pathalgarhi stones for those who marry outside the Munda clans."

"You must have heard the famous story of how Mundas proved theri first claims to the land through the Pathalgarhi stone. In the past, colonial encroachment of tribal lands was resisted by the Mundas through the Pathalgarhi system. In 1908, when asked by the British to produce legal documents stating their right over the land, the Munda carried these Patthals from their Sasandiris hundreds of miles to the then-Viceroy of the region. The Viceroy conducted carbon dating to investigate the claims by the Munda Adivasi to be the first settlers of the land. Even the government of the Gora's (Government of the Whites, i.e. the British) had to agree to our claims."

"Today, our self-governance system, the Gram Sabha institution is threatened. Our lands are being taken away. Adivasis have become slaves in their own land. The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1993, providing a self-governance system for tribals has not been implemented by the Jharkhand Government despite it being passed by the Parliament of India in 1993. The PESA recognizes our right to govern ourselves."

"Through Pathalgarhi, we are creating awareness among the Adivasis of their rights enshrined in our Constitution, which gives right to the Adivasis to self-govern. We are trying to strengthen and claim back the rights of the Gram Sabha, which is central to our self governance. The Constitution of India provides supremacy of Gram Sabha and mandates that all the land acquisition and developmental projects in Schedule V areas be carried out after obtaining permission of the Gram Sabha. Today, no such permission is obtained. We want implementation of the law, which gives the Gram Sabha the right to decide the developmental projects in the region. This is the only way our self governance can be strengthened."

"Since independence all the Governments, whether it is Congress or BJP, have fooled us for the last 70 years. They have not implemented the constitutional provisions which were meant to safeguard the interest of Adivasis. The way Northeastern states in India enjoy the rights being in Schedule VI areas in the same manner we want right of Adivasis in Schedule V areas to be implemented. Since political leaders have failed to implement the rights guaranteed to the Adivasis, and there is regular attempt by the State to forcibly acquire land in tribal areas, we are coerced to start the movement. The main issue is land and our fight is focussed, but not limited, on the issue of land."

The current ruling government is saying that we are doing anti-national things and demands are not constitutional.

He said with emphasis in his voice, "You know why? The BJP government is scared of us. They always think that we are stupid Adivasi who do not understand anythig. What is different this time, is that we are talking to the State in their language. We have inscribed the relevant

constitutional provisions enshrined for the Adivasis on the Pathalgarhi stones to remind the State of our constitutional rights. They are scared that if we start asking for implementation of the Constitutional provisions, they won't be able to take our land."

My friend, Jyotika, who was the journalist accompanying me, quickly jumped into the discussion and posed a question.

Jyothika*: "Many Adivasis in the region have surrendered their important documents issued by the Government like the AADHAR (Unique Identification Cards), ration card, voting card? What is your stand on this? This was a strategy used by Gandhi during his time in Africa to show his protest against the British."*

Yusuf laughed and responded to her.

Yusuf: "Jyotika, I do know about this. That's the reason we want young educated Adivasi to join the Pathalgarhi movement. You represent the new generation of the educated Munda Adivasi women. You can be an inspiration for so many young girls in the village who aspire to study."

"As you know, Jyotika, Our movement is within the four walls of the Constitution of India. Our Constitution provides special status to Adivasis. But today, wherever we go,schools, hospitals, banks, everywhere we are asked to produce documents issued by the Government, thus we are treated like ordinary citizens. Adivasis are not 'aam aadmi' (common man) as stated in the AADHAR card (a 12 digit Unique Identification Number issued by the Government of India), they are a special class and owner of this country. Adivasis also do not need voter cards, as it is a proof of citizenship and meant for casting votes, we (Adivasis) are owners not citizens, so the Government cannot grant voter cards to Adivasis. By granting citizenship and voting rights, Government tries to put Adivasis at par with the common man. This is done with the motive to extend application of laws to the Adivasis and their region and to deny them their special status."

"Government has completely ignored us. We have school buildings, but no teachers. They don't have any benches to sit and no proper food to eat. There is only one government run hospital in the entire Khunti district. Most of the time when we visit the hospital there is no electricity. We do not have any hospitals to go to when we fall sick. Even in the 21st century our kids are dying of malaria and malnourishment. Where does all the money that comes on the name of development goes? All of this has been swindled away by the corrupt officers. What are we left with then?"

Yusuf looked at me with an angry and frustrated face and asked.

Yusuf: "Pallavi, will you send your children to schools like this? Would you ever take your parents to Khunti hospital for treatment? Then why do you expect an Adivasi villager to live a life like this. Is this not unfair?"

"We will establish our own system, where we will run institutions as per our local customs. Our banks, schools, hospitals and defence system shall work for Adivasis. The Gram Sabha will hold all the power and prioritize Adivasi Munda development."

I understood his cause for these demands but I was unable to understand how they run these institutions without government funding. One of the villagers who was standing guard came and whispered something in his ear. He looked at me and then his watch. I knew we had to quickly wrap up the interview.

Pallavi: "This will be my last question to you. What do you mean by separate banks, schools, and hospitals for adivasis? How do you plan to run them?"

Yusuf: "We have just started with our projects. I am surprised out of all the things people talk about banks most. The Bank of Gram Sabha is being welcomed by Adivasis in the region and we are getting calls from different states in India, thus we will be gradually expanding the Bank of Gram Sabha to the rest of India. We are also being threatened with false cases for starting the bank but we are not scared and will continue our project. We need money to invest in our own development."

Pallavi: "I know your movement has been facing several challenges today by the State?

Yusuf: "As you very well might know. This is an old tactic used by the police. On the pretext of maintaining security they are harassing local adivasis. All those riding bikes in the region are unnecessarily stopped by the police and asked for bribes. These policemen are goondas [thiefs/ dacoits] in uniform. They in the name of maintaining law and order are illegally collecting money.We must inform ourselves of all the laws governing us to ensure that we are not unnecessarily harassed by the dikus."

"All those people who comment on our movement should also read the provisions of the Constitution of India and then only should comment on our movement otherwise it will not be a valid comment."

He then said, "I have to go now. We will have to end our conversation over here. I am very happy to meet you both. You guys asked me some good questions."

He then gave me two books which had all the documents used to argue in favour of the demands of the Gram Sabha. These books also clearly mentioned the demands of the movement and the strategies they wanted to use to build their own educational, health, and banking institutions.

Pallavi: "Thank you for your time! And all the best. Johar [Munda greeting]."

Yusuf: "Make sure to share your dissertation copy with me. It's always good to read other peoples research work. I miss my days of teaching in the college. You should teach in the Khunti college. Young people like you can make real change."

I laughed and wished him goodbye again.

This was my last meeting with Yusuf, later on local administration charged him and other Pathalgarhi movement leaders with rape and murder. These charges remain unproven until now. Due to an increase in State repression, the local administration destroyed his mud hut and suspended him from his teaching position in the Torpa, Khunti College. His family was harassed continuously by the local administration. Yusuf and his family escaped from Khunti region and remain untraceable until now.

ANALYSIS:

The Pathalghari movement, although in line with traditional Adivasi goals as I have discussed so far, is also very different from previous movements, including the movement for Jharkhand independence, during which they called for formal independence. By contrast, Pathalghari demands focus on gaining autonomy over their land and resources, and acknowledging the obligations owed to them by the State of India as rightful citizens of India. In addition to demanding for the autonomy over their lands and resources, the Pathalgarhi movement demands for the indegenious-centric development i.e. education, jobs, and health care system. Underlying both the State's denial of these rights, and the Adivasi claim to these rights, is the Adivasi claim to citizenship. The Pathalgarhi movement marks the era where Adivasi Munda relationship to the State is transformed. While the Munda seek to claim their rights by exercising their rights, they are making dialectically contradictory demands. I argue that the Adivasi Munda community asserts their rights as full sovereign citizens of the Indian nation State while distinguishing the state as a separate entity from themselves. In this way, they are demanding recognition by the state while also keeping the state at bay.

The Pathalgarhi movement evokes the Munda community's pride which is crafted over the period of time by the history of resistance. The Pathalgarhi movement uses this as a key strategy to organize and mobilize the Munda community. The movement does that by relying on their traditional practices. The decision of erecting traditional Pathalgarhi stones and using Munda folklore, prayers, song and dances while inaugurating the Pathalgarhi stone in the ongoing movement are the examples of this strategy. These traditional practices which are sacred to the Munda culture have become symbols of the contemporary Adivasi movement and identity today. Thus the sacred, traditional practices like the Pathalgarhi becomes political over here as it evokes Munda cultural identity as a response to the Neoliberal State. In the similar manner, Pathalgarhi movement used the iconic leader Birsa Munda for the Adivasi struggles to evoke the history of resistance by performing prayers for the Birsa Munda, who is also popularly referred as "Bhagwan Birsa" (God Birsa) by the Mundas.

In the Pathalgarhi movement, the Munda Adivasis have effectively used the provisions of the Constitution of India, that safeguard their interest as a key strategy to assert their rights. The act of inscribing provisions of the Constitution of India on the traditional Pathalgarhi marks a departure from the earlier strategies employed in the Munda struggles to defend their lands. This act of using the State language to negotiate with the neoliberal state gives legitimacy to their claims over their lands and forests.

The interpretation of provisions of the Constitution of India by the leaders of Pathalgarhi movement have evoked sharp reactions from many political leaders, State officials, academics and civil society groups. There remains a difference of opinion among the Adivasi themselves. I argue that the debate over correctness of the constitutional interpretation by Pathalgarhi leaders is a different one. However, what is important here is the very act of placing

reliance on the Constitutional provisions by the Munda community and making it central to their movement and this is noteworthy. Nonetheless, these debates over Constitutional provisions have brought the long standing demand of recognition of the self governance institutions at the center stage. Hitherto the demand for strict implementation of the laws have largely been based upon the poor economic conditions and under development of the region. Pathalgarhi movement makes a radical change as it seeks implementation of the laws for claiming autonomy and self governance and rejecting existing systems.

The Pathalgarhi movement is the turning point in Adivasi politics in India, as now they demand not just autonomy over their lands and self-governance, but also marks a shift from the politics of indigeneity in the Adivasi community. As in the case of Pathalagarhi movement they are also asserting their rights for education, health care, employment, etc by claiming their claims over their citizenship. The contemporary Pathalgarhi movement represents the Adivasi political imaginary.

This Adivasi political imaginary is a result of the Adivasi consciousness of living with the State and also constantly negotiating with the State to keep it at bay. I argue that the contemporary Adivasi politics as represented by the contemporary Adivasi movement is a result of the Adivasi history of resistance and also the Adivasi history of subjugation. In this context it becomes important to analyze Adivasi history. In the next section, I will discuss the history of oppression and resistance of the Munda Tribe, during the Colonial Raj and in independent India. I show in the next section that these histories continued to inform each other and have shaped the contemporary Pathalgarhi movement.

2.1 THE COLONIAL STATE AND THE ADIVASI (before 1947)

The exploitation of Adivasis during the colonial period was deeply rooted in the problematic understandings of the tribes the British had. In British India, the term "tribe" was borne out of an administrative need to manage various populations and land. British officials conducted several ethnographies and surveys to categorize tribal populations and differentiate between the categories of "caste" and "tribe" for understanding Indian society. A commonly shared idea running through the various studies of the colonial period was the general assumption that "tribes" are cultural isolates, separated in time and space from mainstream Hindu society and modernity in general. In this regard the British administrators argued that to preserve the distinctiveness of the tribal culture and language, these communities had to be protected from influence from mainstream, non-tribal society (Nongbri 2006).

There is consensus among scholars that this set of colonial representations of the tribe was problematic (Xaxa 1999). Scholars argue that British policies that implicitly aimed to provide these communities protection carried a bias towards containing the "wilderness" of tribal communities. Ultimately one can argue that this categorization is problematic as it essentializes Adivasi communities as primitive and only belonging to the forest which further marginalizes them.

The administrative categorization of tribes also assisted British administrators in maintaining indirect control of tribal tracts, first, by imposing taxes over land and crops by enactment of land and forest laws,[3] and second, through the Christian missionaries' mission to

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[3] The idea of protecting populations identified as "tribal" on the basis of their "primitive" status led the Raj to enact various laws and policies. For instance, the Scheduled Tribe Area District Act (1874) kept communities identified as "tribal" outside the automatic application of general laws. The Act applied to vast stretches of tribal areas throughout the country. It authorized local governments to declare certain communities as tribal, obligated them to respect the tribes, specified which laws were to be or not to be enforced in such districts, and obligated

"civilize" the "barbaric". Nongbri (2006) argues that under the guise of preserving forests and the tribes themselves, the British authorities eroded existing cultural and material bases by disrupting tribal autonomy over their lands and hence, ultimately broke their semi-isolation.

The introduction of land taxes and restrictions over traditional tribal autonomy and which led to shifting agriculture patterns, imposing taxes over the land and crops, and "civilizing" missions, was met by unrest and political turmoil. Thus, any attempt made by the British to "govern" the region was met by resistance as these imposed systems challenged tribal authority and autonomy over their land. In this case, British attempts of subjugating the tribes informed the Adivasi resistance and fought for their land. The experience of confronting the Colonial State led to the construction of the State as "Other" for tribal communities.

Notably, in the late 1700s, the British established the *Zamindari* system in an attempt to control the tribal tracts. The introduction of the *Zamindari* system led to the complete transformation of the Adivasi land systems which had been communally governed by introducing private property, money for financial transactions, and taxes. As a result of the introduction of the *Zamindari* system, there was an influx of Hindu elites arriving in the region who exploited the tribes (Thappar and Siddiqi, 1979) by levying higher taxes on their land. These *Zamindars* also exploited tribals by lending money to them and in return mortgaging their land. The fight against exploitation of adivasis by the money lenders (who often not always were *Zamindars*) became one of the main issues in the post independence Jharkhand movement. The exploitation of the Adivasi by Dikus created a new division in identity between

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them to notify with modifications or restrictions any law enforced elsewhere. Experience of tribal unrest had already prompted the British to come up with a formalized protection system, the earliest one ever enforced. Going forward, the assimilation vs. protection debate remained a prominent argument: which of these historically racialized concepts would be applied by the newly independent Indian government to manage these populations and lands?

the two groups which further solidified the Adivasi class consciousness. This Adivasi class consciousness informed the Adivasi's relationship to their land, *as something to be protected from dikus*. In this way, their experiences of oppression and resistance informed one another.

All these new changes in the land system were met by a series of armed rebellions by these communities against outsiders, including the British. These include the Bhumij Revolt of Manbhum (1798-99), the Chero uprising of Palamu (1800), the Tamar region uprising (1807), followed by the Bhundu region (1819-20) under the leadership of Dukan Mank, Bundu, and the Konta, Kol insurrection (1830-33) (Horo 2013). The initial struggles documented were sporadic and confined to small geographical locations throughout Jharkhand but were impactful enough to grab the attention of the British. These resistance efforts also strongly instilled the difference between two communities through a different understanding of land from the non-tribal communities leading to the creation of the Adivasi class-community consciousness which informed the Adivasi resistance against the dikus. These movements remain a source of inspiration for Munda land struggles.

Among these movements, the Birsa Munda movement remains one of the most memorable. The Birsa movement in the early 20th century spearheaded the agitation against the restrictive measures imposed by the British over the traditional rights of the Mundas over the forests (Thappar and Siddiqi 1979). The Birsa Munda movement was also successful in getting the Adivasi Christian and non-Christian communities together to fight the unjust land laws against their lands which were alienating them from their land. After struggling for three decades, the Birsa Munda movement was successful in getting the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (1908), passed by the British Parliament, which prohibited transfers of tribal land to non-

tribals, and ensured tribal community ownership and management of the rights of forest communities over *khunt katti* areas[4] (Das, 1990).

It was the first formal recognition of Adivasi ownership of the land by dikus. The Birsa Munda movement remains vivid in the memory of the Adivasi consciousness and is a source of inspiration for Adivasi resistance and resilience. The success of the Birsa Munda movement is celebrated by the Adivasi community to this day.

This era of increasing conflict between the Adivasi and the Diku was also met with another development, namely the formation of the first political party based on the "Adivasi" collective identity to represent their issues in the parliament. The *Adivasi Maha Sabha* was formed in 1903 under the leadership of Jaipal Singh Munda (Singh, 1983),. *Adivasi Maha Sabha* later led to the birth of the "Jharkhand Party," which led the movement of demand for a separate state of Jharkhand for its distinct tribal identity.

Post-Independence, these indigenous communities have consistently organized themselves under the banner of the Adivasi class to assert their rights over land and natural resources against the displacement and disruption caused by "development" projects. This has further solidified a particular communal identity formation among *adivasi* communities who share the same experience of alienation from their land and repeated displacements (Skaria 1999).

2.2 THE POSTCOLONIAL STATE AND THE ADIVASI (1947-2000)

As I discussed in the previous section, the term "tribe" was born primarily out of a colonial and administrative need to manage various populations and the vast land of India. The

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[4] Khuntkatti: The descendants of original settlers held common ownership over certain lands in Munda areas.

categorization was based on racialized and essentialized understanding of the communities by colonial anthropologists and administrators. This categorization of "tribe" was in line with the general trend of anthropology at that time, in which the "exotic" was viewed as something worthy of ongoing study and required "protection" to maintain its inherent wildness.

Unfortunately, such racialized understanding of "tribe" continued, following Indian Independence, to overshadow the administrative and political distinction formally recognized in the Constitution by the term "Scheduled Tribe" (Shah 2007). We see a continued paternalism and confusion over the term in newly independent India. The new State debated with itself how to approach these communities as part of a broader process of developing a new national identity. The debates around Adivasi development oscillated between the policies of "assimilation" and "isolation." Those who advocated for the policy of "assimilation" suggested approaching the tribes as a part of the mainstream national development. They argued that the distinction between the "tribe" and "non-tribe" in Indian society does not hold much sociological weight. In contrast to this, those advocating for the "isolationist" policies feared that the mixing of the Adivasi communities would destroy their distinctive culture and way of living. Not having clearly defined policies for the tribes in India led to more confusion at the policy level, while at the grassroots level it translated into further marginalization of the Adivasi.

Both assimilation and isolation have their roots in the British Raj, which essentialized these communities as "primitive" and "wild." These discourses of Adivasi representation are misleading and led to further marginalization of these communities. For instance, on one hand, the Indian government provided reservations for members of Scheduled Tribes in higher education spots and government jobs. This conceptualization of "assimilation" was meant

solely to transform the "backwardness" of these communities, by trying to tie them with the rise of independent India. On the other hand, areas with high concentrations of tribal population were designated as "Scheduled Areas" and were treated as separate administrative categories from the rest of society in order to ensure some level of Adivasi control over their land, forests, water and other natural resources.[5] This allowed the Scheduled Tribes to have some degree of autonomy. Unfortunately, the special provisions made for the tribals remained mostly on paper and the Adivasi situation remains fraught with underdevelopment and poverty.

The newly independent India followed the Nehruvian development model for national development, which emphasized planned industrialization projects centering on heavy industry, including a large expansion of mining and setting up of heavy industries in tribal areas. The socialist framework of development pursued by the central government led to forced acquisition of tribal lands by the government, with the usual problem of inadequate compensation. To add to this discontent, the industrial development brought about a further influx of outsiders, with local people complaining that they were not being hired in sufficient numbers. For instance, the nationalization of the mines in 1971 was followed by the firing of almost 50,000 miners from Jharkhand and their replacement by outsiders (Roy, 1982). "The development program in the post-Independence era and the large, medium and small scale industrialization that occurred played crucial roles in supporting the influx of outsiders in the region as many offices were being set up on the name of such programs and projects" (Das, 1990).

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[5] The Constitution's Fifth Schedule and Sixth Schedule, carried over the principles of the Scheduled Districts Act of 1874 which excluded these Scheduled Areas from the operation of ordinary laws in British India. Since its formation, however, like many of the special tenancy acts in *tribal* areas, the Fifth Schedule has been under constant threat of amendment in order to enable transfers of tribal lands to non-tribals and corporate bodies.

After national independence was achieved, Jharkhand region was a part of Bihar state. Bihar as a whole was dominated by Hindu elites who treated the Jharkhand region, which was predominantly Adivasi, as an internal colony (Roy, 1982). The Jharkhand population felt dispossessed from their own natural resources and land. This exploitation of the resources led to massive underdevelopment in the region. In response, Adivasis continued to resist the outsiders coming to the region and consistently demanded independence for Jharkhand from the Hindu dominated Bihar. Such demand was aimed at stopping the exploitation of the natural resources of Jharkhand and to prioritize Adivasi-centric development. The oppression of the Adivasi and the looting of their resources intensified the demand for the separate State of Jharkhand. Prakash (2001) writes that the Jharkhand movement, though initially based on tribal identity, was later carried on as a movement against the failure of development practices.

Leaders of the Jharkhand movement asserted that the poor condition of the Chotanagpur region was a result of "step motherly," or poor treatment from Bihar. On this basis, they demanded Jharkhand as a separate state. The history of underdevelopment in Jharkhand fits well within the lines suggested by *Dependencia* theory, i.e. underdevelopment theory (Frank 1966), which suggests that present underdevelopment is largely linked to regional dynamics in economic and social history. The long-term underdevelopment of Jharkhand is the result of its colonial past and the adherence to same policies as of the colonial era by different administrations in independent India. This theory, through the metropolis-satellite framework, explains that the regions which are the most underdeveloped today are the ones which had the closest ties to the metropolis in the past. Also, these underdeveloped areas are large exporters of primary products and capital for the world, metropolis. In the case of Jharkhand, this reflects reality. As a region with rich mineral reserves, Jharkhand was

historically well-connected with the global economy through railways. Mining started way back in the 18th century. So, in spite of its close ties with the metropolis sites, it remained underdeveloped. This was only possible through the nature of the state which put satellite states like Jharkhand at the periphery within the nation ("internal colonization") and allowed the exploitation of resources with few spillover benefits. The underdevelopment of Jharkhand region was an important factor in the emergence of development as a politically charged signifier in the Jharkhand movement (Roy 1982). This is yet another example of how the history of oppression, in this case, the economic and social marginality, transformed the Adivasi into a sovereign block demanding statehood for Jharkhand.

The radicalization of the Jharkhand movement under Shibu Soren and Binod Behari Mahto, president and general secretary of the *Jharkhand Mukti Morcha* (JMM) party respectively, led to a profound shift in the Jharkhand movement. JMM was formed in 1973, focused on the agrarian crisis and exploitation by landlords. This led to an adoption of the Jharkhandi identity by non-tribal communities as well. This was a sharp political move by JMM as it was aware of the declining proportion of the tribal population and it also learned from earlier mistakes of the Jharkhand Party. It tried to widen its canvas and gather the support of the working class as well as the peasant class (Prakash, 2001)

At the same time as the struggle for the separate State of Jharkhand movement was in full swing, the United Nations' formal recognition of indigenous rights and protection in 1982 led to an increasing international focus on indigenous issues helped to give the Jharkhand movement more legitimacy and helped unite the disparate groups across the region (Shah 2007).

Indigenous leaders played a crucial role in the reframing of the movement by adopting the international discourse on indigeneity to appeal and advocate for the cause to the international community. Thus, underdevelopment in the region, coupled with a distinct indigenous identity, become the stated motives of the movement. The discourse of underdevelopment fits well with the concurrent rise of "indigenous" discourses at the international level giving the Jharkhand movement more bargaining power. It is by using the language of "indigeneity" that the demand for the separate state of Jharkhand was made. In 2000, Jharkhand was formally recognized by the national government as a separate state.

This concept of indigeneity was a much broader concept than previous ones, which could encompass both Adivasi and non-Adivasi culture as Jharkhandi culture. The Jharkhandi identity represented the aspiration of the Adivasi and non-Adivasi of the region. The Adivasi view of development was based on autonomy over their land and natural resources, while the non-Adivasi Hindu population aspired for market-led development, the latter finding currency in the Jharkhand state government which advocated for Neoliberal corporate projects at large scales. The formation of Jharkhand turned into a nightmare for the Adivasi as the historical demand of preserving tribal identity and promoting self-governance systems of Adivasi was compromised in the newly formed Jharkhand. The oppression of the Adivasi continued after Independence which was met by the strong resistance by the Adivasi community until now. I discuss this in the next section.

2.3 NEWLY INDEPENDENT JHARKHAND STATE AND THE ADIVASI (2000-present)

Upon Jharkhand's independence in 2000, it was quickly apparent to Adivasi communities that this state was not formed in the interest of Adivasi-centric development, but rather to facilitate a Hindu-majority vision of development, i.e. industrialization and consumer

markets. The Jharkhand movement became a reason for Adivasi disillusionment adding to their conceptualization of the State as the Other. While the Adivasi community resented the State and its failure to give them their rights, this failure also fueled the Adivasi discontentment with the state, and their resolve to fight for their rights. On one hand, the Adivasi were continuously engaging in defending their lands against outsiders like the State and corporate actors (*Koel Karo,* Andolan, Movement against the *Arcellor-Mittal*, *Netarhat* Field Firing Range, Andolan). On the other hand, while many of these efforts have been successful in resisting individual state-corporate efforts to grab land and resources, they have been less successful in changing state or global-level trends of neoliberalism; they win battles but are losing the overall war. The continuous emergence of neoliberal development actors has strengthened the Adivasis' disillusionment with the State.The separate state of Jharkhand enabled the conditions for the neoliberal development leading to further alienation of Adivasi from their land and resources. This created disillusionment with and mistrust of the State. In this manner, both their oppression by and resistance against the state mutually influence one another.

ROADS OF OPPRESSION

The first time I visited Siladon Panchayat was in 2012. When I returned in 2017, the roads were bigger, well made, and freshly tarred. Commenting on the roads, my friend Somra said to me, "These roads are a symbol of outsiders entering and looting our region. They are coming to take our lands and minerals. People are very tense as everytime roads are broadened, we lose our land." He lamented, "Since last December, Government officials and police officers made regular visits to the village. Under their pressure, I agreed to give up my land. We were assured that we will get compensation for the lost land, which we never received." Somra had lost a great deal of cultivable land, two mango trees, and one *mahua* tree; these trees were

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critical sources of life-long sustenance for which he felt no compensation could suffice. He further added, "The government belongs to the *Dikus*. I can't explain the extent of what we have lost - the trees we lost served our generations, we danced around them, we ate and sold the products of the trees, used their flowers for offering prayer, we also ate the ants and their eggs near the trees. They are used to prepare delicacies for the feast on festivals. But dikus don't get it. They think by compensating us with money, they can compensate for everything including the trees."

Somra's reaction baffled me. How could Somra be so sure of the State's response and its willful ignorance of the importance of Adivasi land and way of living? Somra's sophisticated understanding of the State's action of taking away their land and forest and his conflation of the State with the outsiders spoke volumes to me. The tension felt by Somra has been a result of a long and historical relationship that the Munda Adivasi share with outsiders and the State, which is marred by the extraction of mineral resources by the state and oppression of Adivasis. In Independent Jharkhand too State's actions were not limited to mass scale land acquisition but involved introduction of massive developmental projects and mineral extractions. Mundas have responded by fiercely resisting against the Neoliberal development in an independent Jharkhand State. The continued oppression by the State has further contributed to the Adivasi consciousness of treating the State as an outsider, while also leading to a stronger Adivasi identity, who collectively felt marginalized by the State's failure to deliver on its promises of prioritizing Adivasi development.

India after 1991 saw an increasingly liberalized economy which sought more privatization of land and natural resources. This trend affected Jharkhand strongly after its independence in 2000. Jharkhand's independence was originally considered a historical

success by locals and progressive organizations that would lead to indigenous-centric development policy: policy that would prioritize indigenous and Adivasi culture, assert indigenous and Adivasi agency over their natural resources and put a rest to the continuous political instability in the region.

However, the Jharkhand government, regardless of which party has been in power, has insisted on promoting neoliberal development projects that promise jobs and industrialization for the region and has also been confronted by continuous resistance by the indigenous communities. These projects have historically involved the systematic and methodical dispossession of local populations from their means of production for survival. Further these populations have been disposed of their political autonomy over their natural resources and land. The majority of development funds were used for three State priorities: neoliberal development projects like mining, deforestation, building roads, toilets and other infrastructure projects (World Bank Report 2007); a massive increase of paramilitary forces deployed against the growing extremist forces; and government schemes launched in the name of protecting the welfare of indigenous communities (Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Area Report, 2008). Together, these efforts, the government argued, would ensure effective development of the region (World Bank, 2007)

"There are appalling rates of rates of poverty, malnourishment and deaths from hunger in the region" (Dreze and Sen, 2015) and high rates of human rights violations involving killings, rapes, and abductions in the region committed by both State and Maoist actors (CDRO Report 2013). The deprivation and dispossession visited upon Jharkhand communities, especially indigenous and Adivasi communities, has only accelerated since 2000. Indigenous rights activists and communities alike have since come to view the last twenty years since

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independence as a "trail of broken promises," political instability and continued underdevelopment (Sharan 2013; Dreze and Sen 2015).

The government's failures here were twofold: first, increasing deprivation due to them not reaching the populations in need and second, their inability to curb local resistance to neoliberal projects like land grabs. They in turn created spaces for various actors like Maoists and missionaries to present themselves as effective partners for the Adivasis. As the government itself has said, "massive underdevelopment and failure of government institutions have left open spaces for these Maoist actors to step in" (Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Area Report, 2008). Both the Maoists and the missionaries have received massive support from the Adivasi Munda community. The Maoist supported the Adivasi initially in their fight against the landlords and later against the neo liberal forces and multinational corporations because that aligned with their politics of resistance. The Missionaries' support of the Adivasi struggle continued because of their focus on education and health in the tribal areas. However, the support of the Maoists for the Adivasi struggle has declined over the years because of the movement's fragmented nature

The history of oppression and subjugation of the Adivasi has been coupled with the history of resistance. The Adivasi have time and again fought against the oppression by outsiders to defend their lands and resources which they consider as their own. These dialectical histories have resulted in the formation of Adivasi consciousness which has led to the creation of the contemporary Adivasi imaginaries as both the subaltern and the sovereign. This similar trend can be seen in contemporary Adivasi politics. The Pathalgarhi movement and State's response to it shows the tension between Adivasi consciousness and the Neoliberal Jharkhand State. However, the Pathalgarhi movement shows the changed Adivasi relationship

to the state as it has been transformed from the binary antagonistic one to the one in which the Adivasi are making claims to the claims of citizenship as a sovereign subaltern citizen. In the next section, I discuss the State's response to the Pathalgarhi movement.

2.4   CONCLUSION: STATE RESPONSE TO THE PATHALGARHI MOVEMENT

I and Kailash, a local friend from Khunti, decided to visit Kochang, which was a Pathalgarhi village. Kochang had recently been in the news because of the "confrontation between the Adivasi Munda participating in the Pathalgarhi movement and the local administration." In this "confrontation," the police forces had opened fire and many villagers were injured, with one of the villagers shot dead. Forces also destroyed many of the villagers' huts and beat children and women present at the meeting. In retaliation for this State violence, the Mundas abducted two guards of the local Member of Parliament, Kariya Munda, whose house was very close to the Kochang village. After keeping the two guards for one whole day, they were released safely. After this incident, the paramilitary forces invaded the village and did not allow any Human Rights groups to visit the area and document the incident.

Kailash and I were able to go to Kochang Village nearly two weeks after this incident had occurred. We decided to reach Kochang early in the morning as the State forces and local administration were continuously surveilling the region. Kailash was not a Munda, but he was a local and people in the villages recognized him as he actively worked on local issues of food insecurity. We knew that villagers were also on alert and were not meeting any new people coming from outside. In their own ways, the villagers were monitoring the area intently and discreetly. I reached Khunti from Ranchi about 5 am in the morning. I decided to take my scooter with me and also cover my face with a cloth and a helmet so that no one would recognize me. I also covered my scooter's number plate with a piece of paper. Kailash and I met near the Khunti bus stop. I picked him up on my scooter and as he had instructed a night

before over the phone, we did not stop anywhere, heading straight to the village, about 15 kim distant. Kochang was nestled in the beauty of lush green dense forest. In my head, I was thinking how these police forces cruelly wrecked these beautiful villages.

Upon our arrival, I found people behaving differently in Kochang. It did not resemble a normal morning routine of a Munda village. Usually, during mornings in a Munda village, one can see people busy preparing for the day, women washing dishes at the wells and fetching water for cooking, people taking out their cattle for grazing and children getting ready to go to school. In contrast, on that day, we barely saw anyone and after a long wait we saw 2-3 men and women doing daily chores. It was also the day on which the weekly Gram Sabha meeting was scheduled, for 5:30 a.m. The night before planning this trip, Kailash had contacted his friend John, who was a resident of this village and informed him about his visit and John had agreed to meet us. But now, his phone was switched off and we could not find him.

After waiting for an hour, we decided to go to the *Aakhra (*meeting place of Gram Sabha under the tamarind tree*)* where the *Gram Sabha* was supposed to take place. We could not see anyone over there either. Kailash told me in a very slow voice, "They are observing us. We need to be patient. Let's keep waiting here." After waiting for half an hour more, we observed two men coming towards us. They were both in their early twenties, with thin frames and were wearing colourful vests and denim pants. They both had tied a cotton cloth on their head. They asked for our identification cards and inquired about our purpose of visit. We handed our identity cards to them, which they carefully inspected and handed them back to us. We explained to them our purpose of the visit and about Kailash's friend John, whom we were planning to meet there. They both looked at each other, and said "Give us some time, we will get back to you." After more than an hour, four to five different men came towards us and

asked us to follow them to the village church; we quietly followed them. They apologized for making us wait and said, "We recognize you guys well, but we have to abide by what we decide in the village". There we met John, who shook hands and said "We are carefully observing everyone coming inside the village. There are a good number of chances officials from the local administration or any spies could have followed you. As you know, after what happened last week we are on alert at all times." He further added, "there are very clear but informal instructions given to us by local administration to not to gather anywhere or have any meetings. They have also sent us informal notice on paper, though it doesn't have any government office stamp instructing us to not to hold any gram sabha meetings." John added, "If we do not stick together, we will completely vanish together. Let's quickly talk and get back to our places."

Upon asking them what had happened the day of the incident, John pointed to one of the boys in the group who was fourteen years old, and asked him to narrate his story. The minor narrated his ordeal in his dismayed voice, which had a lot of anger, he said, "They (Police) came to our village and randomly started beating us. They beat me and my sister mercilessly who is 12 year old, until she became unconscious. It was a weekend and no doctors were available in the hospitals. We had to take her to Ranchi for treatment. They did not spare even old people in the village. Tell us how it is fair to beat children and old people."

On June 26, 2018, a Pathalgarhi meeting was held in Ghaghra village, with 2,000 people in attendance. These villagers had gathered from nearby areas to inaugurate a new Pathalgarhi stone which was to be erected outside the Kochang village. Despite it being a peaceful event, the local administration and police showed up at the meeting venue on the pretext of searching for people who had been charged with rape and assualt case. John described the State forces that day, "It was not just ten or fifteen police officers. It was around

25-30 trucks [approximately 3000 paramilitary personnel]. It was out of question that we could have negotiated with them. All this was pre-planned." John added, "The minute we saw so many paramilitary forces gathering around the event, we were horrified, we knew what was coming next." John explained that the group was not sure what to do at first upon the paramilitary's arrival. He said, "The best strategy was to get women in front. Around 70-80 women stood between the group and the paramilitary forces.These women were unarmed. We wanted to make sure that the Paramilitary forces do not directly start attacking the people gathered in the meeting." John added, "This bought us some time to send a group of 7-8 men for peaceful negotiations. The men who went to negotiate with the paramilitary forces immediately got attacked by the police. We made sure to announce it on the loudspeaker repeatedly so that officials present at the site with the paramilitary understood our request." While explaining the horror of the event he added, "We then saw these women pleading with the police forces to leave these men." Frustrated with the police action of not listening to their request, group of about 50-60 unarmed Munda Adivasi women retaliated with bare hands and chased several police officers, who took refuge in a local Lok Sabha member's house, Kariya Munda.[6] The Munda Adivasi women group then abducted four house guards, who were guarding the house of the leader. These women then demanded for peaceful talks between them and Khunti administration for the release of these four house guards."

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[6] Kariya Munda, member of parliament and the former Deputy speaker (2009-2014) of the 15th Lok Sabha. He has been elected 8- time MP from Khunti constituency of Jharkhand State

The next day, on June 27, a large battalion of paramilitary personnel were deployed, who ransacked the whole village, mercilessly beat villagers, raided houses, used tear gas and violent *lathi* (batons) to attack villagers, causing the death of one person. Late in the evening, abducted Hohouse guards were released on the assurance of the district administration of maintaining peace and not attacking local villagers. However, the promise of police to maintain peace was not kept and villagers were attacked again, this time by a bigger group of police forces.

The next day, on June 28, Ghagra and seven other villages were completely evacuated by the police. John added, "We are all still in trauma! Many of the villagers who ran towards the forest have not returned to their homes since then." John and other men showed us the broken huts and vehicles. Paramilitary forces had also destroyed stored food grains in peoples houses and killed their cattle. I was very upset and angry after listening to the testimonies of the villagers. This was yet another act of state repression in response to perceived dissent by the Adivasis.

After the meeting, Kailash went back to his home in Khunti and I straightway returned to Ranchi because of the increasing State surveillance and deployment of police forces in the region. It was becoming very difficult for me to stay back in Khunti as anyone from outside the region was being interrogated by the police and looked with suspicion of being involved in the movement. Next day evening, I started getting repeated calls from Kailash. After missing his calls initially when I was able to take his call. He was panicking. He said that the Intelligence Bureau (IB) officials came to his house to inquire about me. Officials asked Kailash questions focused on the purpose of my visit, and where I was receiving funding for my work in Khunti. Kailash told me that he fears being implicated in a false case and would

be going to another town, Kanpur, where his brother worked in a factory. He said he would return after a few months when things calmed down. He then suggested to me that I do not come to Khunti for the next few weeks.

The incident in Kochang made me very unsettled. With the help of some activists, we were able to put a team of Delhi-based activists and lawyers together who would go to affected villages and make reports. But this team was stopped by the police to visit Pathagarhi villages. The team then spoke to villagers from adjoining villages and gathered relevant information about the incident and later prepared a detailed report, documenting evidence of police brutality and sought judicial inquiry in the matter.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I again decided to return to Kochang to follow up with the developments. However, my contacts citing the prevailing situation of increased State surveillance in Khunti asked me not to meet in Kochang, instead suggested meeting in a different village, Ghagra, which is about 40 kms from Kochang. After reaching the village Ghagra, they asked me to wait near a small makeshift grocery store which was near the road. After waiting for half an hour, a small girl of 7-8 years old came to me and said, "Park your scooter here and I will accompany you to the place where my mom is working." She and I walked together a few miles through the fields and reached a spot behind a big hay stack. There were around eight to nine people sitting there on a plastic sheet under the sun. We greeted each other and they offered me a glass of water and hot Kaali Chai (black tea). Although it was a very sunny and hot day, I followed an important fieldwork rule, namely that you never say no to food and water offered by my interviewees. As the conversation started, Amrita, the only woman in the meeting, said, "Pallavi, I apologize for making you wait at the tea shop." She added how they had to be alert at all times due to State surveillance. Ramesh, one of the people

I had met in Kochang, pointed to the hut he was living in, saying, "I do not have any police case registered on my name, yet police officials bulldozed my hut by a bulldozer. Since I was involved in the Pathalgarhi movement they recognized me and every few days they come with a bulldozer and ask me to name people involved in the Pathalgarhi movement, when I refuse to share details, they break my house. I have shifted to several makeshift places due to this reason. It's not me alone there are several villagers, who are also facing such police brutality." Amrita further added that paramilitary Jawans (officers) had come inside their huts unannounced and destroyed their grains and chickens. While I was taking detailed notes, they showed me a notebook in which they had created a list of villagers they knew were being surveilled or harassed on the pretext of being involved in anti-State activities. They also had a list of people who were arrested and were languishing in jail and requested me for legal aid. I then put them in contact with my friends who were human rights activists. In India, the term "tribe" was born primarily out of a colonial and administrative need to manage various populations and the vast land of India. and lawyers. Their case was further taken up and many of them were later released on bail. However, the cases are pending till today.

The State's response to the Pathalgarhi movement was extremely violent and it used all its machinery to terrorise people involved in the movement. The blatant use of arms by the police and armed forces against unarmed villagers was not only illegal and inhumane but was deliberate to have a chilling effect. Sedition cases were registered against about 30,000 Adivasi Munda residing in Khunti villages, in some cases naming all residents inhabiting a particular village. Such blatant misuse of the Sedition law, which is a colonial-era law against such a large section of the society was the first of its kind in independent India. Sedition cases are registered mostly against individuals, not in such a blanket manner. In addition to sedition,

many activists and villagers were also illegally charged with criminal cases by the local police. Most of these criminal cases are false without proof, which are bound to fail during the trial but they are only registered to create fear among the protestors. However, many Mundas were arrested after this incident, including top leaders of the movement. The exact number of persons arrested remain unclear; however, most of them are out of jail but the cases are still pending. Sadly but not surprisingly, many social activists who showed their solidarity with the Mundas on social media were also booked under Sedition law. This is a fairly common tactic used by the current Modi administration, to use laws like sedition, as a tool to suppress any form of dissent. Sedition is also used against people involved in social movements, who oppose so-called developmental projects, which are detrimental to the interest of the poor and more particularly Adivasis.

Even after months of the Kochang incident, villagers in the region were continuously harassed by police and security forces on a daily basis. Under the pretext of maintaining law and order, heavy forces were deployed in the villages, with schools sometimes being converted into makeshift barracks (Refer to figure 13: School Taken Over By The Paramilitary Forces In Khunti), making it into a police state. These forces used to check the entry and exit of everyone in the village and unnecessarily harassed them, sometimes by requiring a fee to enter and leave. Anyone not belonging to the village was not allowed entry without the permission of the security forces. Villagers were frisked and their belongings were checked when they left the village to buy something. Though these strict measures were relaxed in many areas later, some continue to experience a heavy deployment of forces. Free and fair movement of villagers is not permitted, clearly violating their fundamental rights enshrined under the Constitution of India.

The oppression of Adivasis was further accentuated by the slow, costly, complex and indifferent judicial process. Many Adivasis were languishing in jail since they did not have money to pay legal fees, with some having to sell their land and belongings to bail their relatives. The superior courts (like the High Court and the Supreme Court) have also failed to provide timely relief to the Adivasis against whom false cases were registered.

As the time passed on, the movement's activities have continued to be carried out very secretly. Villagers continue to hold regular Pathalgarhi and Gram Sabha meetings. After a few days, I learned from a friend that a new Pathalgari stone was erected in Kochang Village, to commemorate the movement's martyrs. Inscription on one of the Pathalgarhi stone (refer to Figure 4: Pathalgarhi Stone Commemorating Martyr "Amit Joseph Topno"), commemorating the killing of a young Munda Adivasi journalist states, "Everyone wishes for the rebirth of Birsa Munda but not in their own homes but neighbours." Amit Topno (31 Jan 1985-9 Dec 2018) worked fearlessly and with deep commitment, as a journalist and a social worker, to safeguard constitutional and traditional rights of the Adivasis. He was shot dead on 9 Dec, 2018 . For lifetime, he shall stand as a rock for our society."

It is noteworthy that the inscription on the stone was in Hindi, not Mundari. I believe this was a deliberate and strategic move, to convey the message of oppression and resistance of adivasis to the non-adivasi people. The State's oppression of the Adivasi has only fueled the latter's resistance efforts. When you deny a group the rights which are due to them, by socially, economically, and politically marginalizing them, they will seek to remind the State of their rights (as per the State's legal and political frameworks). Thus, denial of their citizenship rights only fuels their rightful claims to citizenship and calls for autonomy over their land.

The current grassroots politics of the Munda tribe as represented in the Pathalgarhi movement is the response to the oppressive State policies which have not only failed to address Adivasi issues but have exploited their land and resources. The policies proposed by the State focus on neoliberal development and prioritizing corporate development, leading to massive displacement, and political turmoil in the region. In addition to the loot of resources and land, there has been continuous undermining of the local customs and practices of Adivasis in State polity. Such marginalisation alongwith historical injustice has also fuelled the anger among the Adivasis both against the outsiders and the State. This anger and distrust with the State has pushed the Adivasi to resort to extreme measures. Pathalgarhi too, for many, is an extreme step. Pathalgarhi has created a difference of opinion within Adivasis too.

The current Munda Adivasi struggle represents the changing nature of Adivasi-State relationship- previously it was antagonistic but today, it's much more complex. The relationship of the Adivasi with the State is one that involves both oppression and resistance. The key elements underlying this relationship are claims to citizenship and land rights. The Adivasi have a long history of fighting for their citizenship rights while also using claims to citizenship to advocate for access to health, employment and education and other human development issues. This history dates back to colonial and postcolonial era state-tribe politics, which informs contemporary Adivasi-led social movements, such as the Pathalghari movement.

Adivasi have historically contested for the defending their lands and forests from the outsider forces and this remains as the main motivation of the contemporary Adivasi struggles. Both the The Pathalgarhi movement calls for understanding these motivations which define the relationship between the land and the Munda community and in turn shape their identity

and politics as a response to the Neoliberal State. I have discussed this relationship between

the Adivasi and the Munda in Chapter 3 & 4 for this dissertation.

3   CHAPTER 3: MUNDA ADIVASI AND LAND

"When the elephant came before me, I closed my eyes and prayed to the elephant god

(not the Hindu God Ganesha) to not harm me,"- Bhudhwi.

Bhudwi was narrating to me a story of the time when she was confronted by an elephant in the jungle during one of the excursions the villagers had taken to collect *Char* (Chironjee seeds) from the forest. On a regular basis, perhaps every other week, men and women of the village would venture into the forest to collect *Char* to sell in the weekly market. *Char* sold at a very high price in the market, and often to Hindu traders and middlemen. Due to its high demand and value, villagers were keen on collecting *Char* as often as they could, despite the risk of coming across elephants in the forest.

I asked her, "Didn't you get scared of the elephant? It could have harmed you. Why didn't you run?" Bhudwi responded only with a smile on her face, making me feel quite ignorant for having asked that seemingly-logical question making me feel quite ignorant for having asked that seemingly-logical question. She then replied, "How would running help? I just didn't realize it had come that close to me! It was standing right in front of me. Surprisingly, it was not with his herd, and came upon me by walking very softly without making any noise." I then asked, "If you see it again while you're with the other villagers, would you kill the elephant?" She adamantly said, "Never".

Bhudwi and I began our conversation in the evening time, after Bhudwi had returned home from grazing her cattle in the forest. I would often visit Bhudwi, who lived not far from Neeti's village. She made for wonderful company, as she always had the most interesting stories and Munda villager gossip. After arriving home, she quickly began cooking dinner,

offering me *kaali chai* (black tea) while we conversed near her *choolah* (a cooking stove made of mud). I was already drenched having had ridden my bicycle to Bhudwi's house in the rain. Patting a small *peeri* (stool) that was near the *choolah*, Bhudwi told me, "Pallavi, sit near the *choolah,* or you will fall sick." I obliged as she began adding more firewood to stoke the fire and warm the kitchen. Sipping on the *kaali chai* Bhudwi made for me, I asked Bhudwi what she planned on cooking for dinner. She replied, "*Aloo* (potato) and *Mandi* (rice)" – a staple of every Mundari household.

Bhudwi was very old. She had a wrinkly face and despite her age, lived by herself. As a result of her independence, she relied heavily on forest produce for her living and day-to-day expenses. Bhudwi lived in a one room house made of mud with a thatched roof. A stickler for cleanliness, Bhudwi's kept her house impeccably clean, despite her other responsibilities. As with other Mundari mud houses, Bhudwi's house consisted of very few things. Due to the constant rain, Mundari people have to hang their washed clothes inside their mud houses for drying; within Bhudwi's house, there was a rope that extended from one wall to the other upon which her washed clothes and sheets hung to dry. In the left corner of her house was the kitchen area, which consisted of a plank of wood Bhudwi used to sit and cook her food. This area also had a mud *choolah*, utensils, spices, and oil for cooking. In the right corner, was a pile of rice bags covered in several sheets of plastic for protection from the rain; she stored rice in this manner for the year around. Behind the rice bags was a small pile of firewood which she used to cook and warm her house. Built purposefully as a windowless structure, her house, like all other Mundari houses, remained warm in the winter and cool in the summer.

As Bhudwi narrated her story of meeting the elephant, her face lit up with excitement. She explained, "I was very happy to see the elephant. When people in the village

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talked about elephants, I always wondered what an elephant looked like! I said to myself, elephant God has heard my prayers! I have never seen an elephant in my life and now I got the chance to see it." Knowing that elephants were not a rarity in the area, I was a bit surprised at her narrative, and asked, "How is it possible that you've never seen an elephant in your lifetime?" Bhudwi replied, "Elephants never came to the village when I had eyesight like yours." She added, "At night when I'd hear people running to scare the elephant away from the village, I would try to run with them. But my eyesight is so poor now, that I cannot run with the other villagers at night, especially in the middle of the jungle. Elephants would keep coming at night; they would destroy our crops and damage our houses. I always wanted to see them, and often prayed in my heart to the elephant god – 'I would like to see you someday".

"So, when I met the elephant in the Jungle, I closed my eyes and prayed to him: 'Elephant god, I am thankful to you for presenting yourself to me. Thank you for hearing my prayer. I am not here to harm you, so please don't hurt me." In an eager but hushed tone, Bhudwi added, "I was standing alone in front of the elephant I said to him, 'In the same way you are collecting food for yourself, I am also here to collect my food.' I then slowly walked away and the elephant didn't harm me." Budhwi's face lit up with pride as she concluded her story of encountering the elephant, leaving me to ponder at her story as she continued to peel potatoes.

ANALYSIS

Buddhwi's story made me wonder – Instead of running away from this massive creature, or attacking it by calling the other villagers, why did Bhudwi decide to pray to the elephant? Shah (2007) argues that elephants coming increasingly into Adivasi villages makes them more

vulnerable to poverty, to an extent that she believes they would rid themselves of the troublesome animals altogether if they could. But I found something different.

In this chapter, I argue that Bhudhvi's decision to pray in front of the elephant, rather than run away from it was based primarily on her understanding of, and relationship with nature. Her decision was informed by her very being – her ontology rooted in everyday life experiences, related to place and nonhuman beings, that included particular meanings of nature, core elements of Adivasi Munda alterity.

This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section I discuss Munda interactions with local administration and upper caste Hindu men. The following section discusses the untouchability practiced by the Munda community against the Mallah (fisherman) community. The third section discusses Adivasi strategies used in confronting elephant herds which were invading their land and fields and destroying their crops. Finally, the last section discusses the Adivasi communal governance system as an alternative to the governance of the Neoliberal State.

I have discussed the Adivasi way of living and confronting the neoliberal State as being embedded in their Munada alterity. As a Munda Adivasi woman, in Bhudwi's reality, Munda Adivasi life is inherently tied with the land, its meaning, its resources and the creatures that inhabit it. For Bhudwi, the forest is a most critical source of food for both her and the elephant she encountered. In the reality of the Munda Adivasi, forests are not reserved solely for humans – they coexist with the forest and all those creatures that reside within it, also benefiting from and depending upon its vast resources. Elephants are not seen primarily as threats, but as relatives. This critical awareness of coexistence is evident at several levels of Munda Adivasi

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life, as is indicated by Bhudwi's reliance on subsistence and forest produce for her own survival.

The question is whether we can even for a moment inhabit Bhudwi's belief that elephants – as avatars of god – listen to prayers. For Bhudwi, her ways of knowing and being include and exceed the simple distinction made between humans and nonhumans, in modernist epistemologies. Can we even translate Bhudwi's ontology into "modern" analytical frameworks and academic language that we comprehend? Arturo Escobar (2016) in his work, "Thinking-feeling with the earth" argues that the ontological dimension of the 'Epistemologies of the South framework' acknowledges pluriverse ontologies. He argues that these ontologies are based in the social-historical context of the land struggles. Thus giving us an analytical framework to understand Budwi's world and her relationship with the elephant.

Elephant herds entering the villages of the Munda Adivasi is fairly common, but in the past few years, these instances have increased due to the massive deforestation carried out by corporate actors. This deforestation has led to a stark shortage of food resources for elephant herds, causing them to enter Adivasi villages, destroy rice paddies and crops, and damage Adivasi homes in their wake. In some instances, these elephants have also killed people. Unlike non-Adivasi rural agricultural communities in India that have demanded state permission for hunting invasive wild animals that similarly destroy their yields, the Munda Adivasi community has never demanded that the government kill the elephants that cause them so much harm. While outsiders may remain baffled as to why the Munda Adivasi refrain from killing wild animals, the answer to this question is obvious to the Munda Adivasi.

Adivasi Munda hunt wild animals for their food and feast, however they do not hunt excessively. Their hunting is limited only to their need – but only as it relates to their sustenance. Their hunting is not driven by the motive of selling excess meat and animal products in the market for profit. In addition, their agricultural practices and raising of cattle is also solely for the purpose of sustaining their livelihoods. In this way, animals are not only treated as sacred by the Adivasi as avatars of God, but they are also an inherent part of the environment that the Adivasi seek to live in harmony with. Perhaps most interestingly, in the most complex of ways, the elephant's recent and harmful entry into the community, not the elephant itself, is an analogous manifestation of the neoliberal Indian state that seeks to invade the lives and land of the Adivasi Munda.

The nuanced situation that the Adivasi Munda find themselves in as a result of their tense relationship with the state is only made more complex when we consider that the ontology of alterity based in a relationship with animals and their land, includes both a peaceful coexistence and simultaneous violence. This reality only speaks to the unstable natural environment that they inhabit as Adivasis in contemporary, neoliberal India.

In the moment that Bhudwi confronted the elephant, Bhudwi interpreted the elephant through the understandings she has learned and as a result of the changes in the world she has lived in. For Bhudwi, the elephant she encountered was not just a source of bewilderment or fear – this elephant, and many others like it were a threat that invaded her fields and jungles, and a threat that remains partially protected by the state. These elephants had become a danger to the Munda Adivasi as a result of the massive deforestation undertaken by the neoliberal State. As the elephants are an internationally recognized endangered species the state provides protection to the elephants from being killed or hunted. The State can heavily

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financially penalize the offender or sentence them to prison. She knew that neither she, nor the other Mundas she could have called for help could do anything if the elephant were to attack; she couldn't kill it, or harm it as an Adivasi. Not only would that mean disrupting the balanced relationship that the Adivasi maintain with the animals on their land, but such an act would also involve harsh penalties administered by state authorities. Taking an action against the neoliberal state – in both the form of an elephant, and the form of the state meant that the state would encroach upon their village once again. From my perspective, for Bhudwi, the elephant simultaneously embodies several positions: sacred avatar, animal, and the neoliberal state – which invades her forest and land, but with which she has learned to coexist. Given all this, we can begin to see the reason why, standing in front of a massive elephant, Bhudwi took on her only choice – to pray the elephant away.

Does understanding indigenous peoples and their politics require a fundamental rethinking of western interpretive frames? Can we truly understand Bhudwi's worldview as it includes and excludes the modern way of understanding and being? Remaining cognizant of these many complexities undergirding our understanding of the Munda Adivasi is ultimately what allows us to gain a better understanding of this community. The matter of the elephant brings us to a fundamental question which I seek to explore: What is the meaning of land and forest for the Munda community? And how do these meanings shape their politics?

3.1   MUNDAS, THE GRAM SABHA, AND DIKUS

"How can we explain to you… You cannot possibly understand us." In a meek voice, the Munda villager's words fumbled as he shivered in fear and hung his head low. "Speak loudly! Speak loudly and clearly so all of us can hear you!" demanded the paramilitary official. In Mundari, another villager chided his fellow villager in a low voice, saying, "Why are you

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telling them this! They will never understand what we are saying." Adding to the conversation, another villager said "Yeah, this will only worsen the situation…let's just agree to what they are saying and apologize." In silent agreement, the villagers resignedly nodded their heads.

This excerpt is of the discussion of a pivotal meeting I observed between the CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) officers, Adivasi Munda villagers, and a few upper caste Hindu men. Some of the attending Adivasi Munda villagers had captured and abducted ten Hindu men from the State Capital of Ranchi who had entered the village. These men had entered the village without the permission of the Gram Sabha.

I was in attendance at the meeting with a few friends who were working in the region. Because people could easily recognize that I was an outsider, I was afraid of being caught for having come into the region without informing the local administration. However, had I informed the local administration of my entry into the area, they would have undoubtedly monitored my activities and movement in the Khunti region. To inform the local administration of who you are is not mandated by the law, but being in a "conflict-hit" region, means that local officials are keen on monitoring anyone new in the region under suspicion of being a Maoist sympathizer. In fact, most scholars, activists, or any new faces in the region are routinely scrutinized with great suspicion by both the local administration and paramilitary forces. Knowing this, I had decided against informing the local administration of my entry, and instead did my fieldwork discreetly. However, my presence as an outsider at this meeting was undeniably obvious, and quickly invited a brief interrogation by a CRPF officer who asked me who I was and what I was doing in the region. Noting my fear during this interrogation, one of my friends came to my rescue and told him that I worked with an NGO and had recently moved to Khunti.

It was late on a dark, sweltering summer evening. The meeting took place at the CRPF compound located deep inside the jungle. This particular compound was one of the biggest bases in the Khunti region, however, despite its important status as a form of critical military control, this base lacked electricity and was dimly lit by a few lightbulbs that were weakly powered by a kerosene-run generator. As a run-down compound, the living conditions of the paramilitary officers were quite poor. Due to the excessive heat, a vast majority of the attending officers were standing guard in their official vests but with their shirts open, donned in their uniform pants with slippers or sandals on their feet. It was certainly a most odd sight; the clothed appearance of these serious-faced, threatening soldiers offered a paradoxical sight that instilled simultaneous fear and amusement at how these paramilitary forces lived in such conditions. Those who stood guard had big AK-47s slung over their almost-bare chests, and were silhouetted against three war tanks standing on the compound grounds. To add to the rather tense situation, I could also count fourteen to fifteen military trucks standing outside the compounds. This meeting was definitely atypical, especially since it required such a strong paramilitary presence.

In an authoritative stance, the lead paramilitary officer was sat in his chair with his feet planted wide apart on the floor, with both his hands at his waist. His stance was suggestive of a dismissive attitude towards the situation, but still indicated a sense of authority – he clearly wanted the issue resolved as quickly as possible. In an assertive voice, to everyone sitting on the floor in front of him, he said "Why can't you talk to all of us?! – explain to everyone what you are saying…Why are you talking in Mundari! Don't you guys know that everyone can't understand Mundari?" The Hindu men who were abducted were sitting opposite across the Munda Adivasi. One of them asked the Adivasi Munda villagers, "What did we do wrong? We

were biking the region; we have a right to." His tone implied the sense that, as an Indian citizen, he had a rightful to travel in the village. He added, "Khunti [meaning the town] has newly built roads deep inside the jungles. Everyone should be able to come here without fear." The man was speaking to the fact that the government of India has built new roads in the region over the last 20 years, to transport raw materials, an sign of the advance of neoliberal development in Jharkhand.

In response, the Adivasi men replied: "We had clearly written in Hindi outside the village, that no one can enter the village area without the permission of the Gram Sabha". This was a clash of Adivasi sovereignty and the sovereignty of the Indian State, overseen by a Hindu paramilitary. Another member of the Hindu group laughed sarcastically, saying "Who made this law? We never knew that laws like this exist." Another Hindu man looked towards the paramilitary officer for support, saying "We were only biking. We all decided to stop, get some water from the handpump and drink beer. All of a sudden, we saw women with stones, wooden sticks, sickles, and axes coming toward us. They surrounded us so quickly. We kept telling them not to bother us, and started our motorbikes to leave when the men showed up behind their women with axes, sickles and wooden sticks. These men asked us if we had Gram Sabha's permission to enter the village. And we told them that we are just here for a few and will leave. But they took our bike keys, helmets, and tied our hands!" The men became aggressively louder. "They then took us to an old school building in the village and kept us there for so long! After six hours Gram Pradhan [leader of the Gram Sabha] showed up and said we will only let you go if you pay a fine of Rs 500 *(less than 10 dollars)*. This is the Gram Sabha's decision."

Gram Pradhan was also attending the meeting, and replied to the complaining man, saying "We didn't hurt you or harm you. We also gave you food to eat. We first asked you to leave the village politely. But you didn't bother to even listen to us." Intervening between the men during this heated exchange, the lead CRPF officer looked at the Munda Adivasi and asked, "They are right! Who made this law, and for whom? Why can't they enter the village?" In an angry and condescending tone, he said "The stupidity of you guys…Such an incident takes place and then educated people like me to have to come and work in this remote region where we have no life… Control your foolish behavior." Continuing in this condescending tone, he said, "Look, by your foolish behavior, no one gains anything. Look at you guys, have you ever seen bikes in your life? You guys captured these men because they had money and bikes." The paramilitary officer continued to mutter away in annoyance. The Adivasi men had kept quiet during the officer's lecture but now began quietly talking among themselves. Noting their conversation, the CRPF officer said once more, "If you don't apologize to these men I will not let you go. We all just want to live in peace. *Bas karo isse*! (End this now!)" After a few more minutes of discussion among the Adivasi, the Gram Pradhan stood up, folded his hands and said, "I apologize on behalf of the Gram Sabha."

During my time in the region, I witnessed several incidents such as this one. It was more than common to see local administrations or Diku administrations take the side of non-tribals while also failing to acknowledge Adivasi sovereignty over the territory, or the Munda Adivasi way of living. This was also not the first time that the Adivasi Munda expressed their collective anguish over the failure of outsiders to respect their authority. Hindus and the Adivasis have lived alongside one another for several years, but Hindu communities have made little effort and progress in trying to understand the Adivasi. This is primarily due to the power

relation that exists between Hindu and Adivasi peoples in the region. Not only do Hindus consider themselves as superior to the Adivasis, but CRPF officers, who are also Hindu, carry out their own biases against the Adivasis, which are reaffirmed by their belief in taming and controlling the Adivasis in order to protect the interests of Hindu villagers. Thus, the complicated relationship between the Hindu communities and the Adivasi Munda community has only increased the divide between the two, as a result of the actions of local administrations.

This situation illuminates the everyday marginalization of Adivasis by the State, through the State's coercive powers which frame the Adivasis on false charges to ensure their incarceration in local jails. Due to their history and relationship with the state, Adivasis such as those in this meeting are well aware of the discriminatory power of the State, and acknowledge their subordinate position before CRPF officers and the Hindu people. This knowledge and experience of domination shape the negotiation tactic enacted by the Adivasis – for them, the best way to negotiate such a tense situation was simply to apologize and put the matter to rest. Had they not apologized, the situation would have only aggravated the CRPF officers and Hindu men, and the Adivasis in attendance would most likely have been thrown in jail. Thus, the apology extended by Gram Pradhan on the behalf of the Gram Sabha was in no manner a sincere apology for what had happened – it was simply a tactical step stemming from the Adivasi state of learned helplessness.

It is key to note that this anecdote is evidence of the Adivasi's strategic resistance to not only safeguard their region from the influx of people coming from outside of the region, but to also maintain the autonomy of the Gram Sabha. The Gram Sabha is considered as a crucial part of the Adivasi political resistance, culture and everyday life. For the Adivasis in this meeting, upholding the Gram Sabha's decision, and portraying it as the singular authority

to which they remain loyal and acknowledge is crucially important. The Gram Sabha's decision to not allow outsiders in the village stems from the Adivasi experience of continual loss of their land by the neoliberal state under the pretext of development. This meeting, its strategic negotiation tactic, and the Adivasi loyalty to the Gram Sabha are all examples that show the extent to which Adivasi Munda men and women go to fight for their land which they believe is rightfully theirs.

This is also not the first instance when local administrations and government officials have failed to implement the laws of the provisions of The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (hereinafter referred as PESA Act) which seeks to protect the Adivasi Right to self-governance. The PESA Act recognizes the Gram Sabha as a legitimate governing authority, and is intended to remedy the exploitation of the tribal population by allocating resource distribution powers to Gram Sabha, vesting the Gram Sabha with authority in matters of land acquisition and grant of mining leases, among others. The purposeful response of bureaucracy in ignoring the PESA ACT has been disappointing; many officers do not have adequate knowledge about the special status of the PESA Act especially as it applies to the Munda Adivasi. Such ignorance is often deliberate. Laws like the PESA Act are seen by the officers as a hindrance in growth and are dealt with contempt when they are brought up by the Munda Adivasi. The constant push for development projects by the neoliberal state poses a consequent threat to the identity of tribes. As such, resistance is not only inevitable, but is borne out of this political quagmire.

Most critically, perhaps, is the initial Adivasi Munda's comment: "How can we explain to you! You can't possibly understand us." This simple, yet powerful comment is indicative of the deep frustration of the Adivasis, and the resentment and consciousness of a lack of

recognition and respect that they feel that the State and local administration take towards their way of life, belief systems and historical presence in the region. This statement spoke volumes to me. The Adivasi history of everyday oppression and abuse by the State informs us of the State's approach and lack of understanding towards the Adivasis. The Adivasis are aware that the State lacks the ability and empathy it needs to understand their ways of being and their sovereignty. The Adivasis understand that they are different from the State; that they are not viewed as part of the State; that they have a worldview not shared by the State – that, in essence, they cannot possibly be understood by this authoritative outsider.

Having witnessed this incident, I was compelled to continuously think about my research and positionality within my work. I knew that I would always be an outsider for the Munda Adivasis, and lack the ability to truly understand their worldviews. Although I could spend vast amounts of time with the Munda Adivasi, sharing friendships with them, partaking in their everyday life, agricultural practices, and sense of community, I know I am not one of them. Even though they have shared and taught me the meanings of their everyday lives, and I cannot claim to have the same lived experience that forms their alterity.

Furthermore, as a third world woman in a position of privilege in the American academy, my training in western academia is based in modern epistemologies which ultimately fall short of explaining Munda alterity. I have come to understand that this alterity cannot possibly abide by the binary logic of modernity touted by western academia, as this alterity exists outside of such modern epistemologies. Recognizing the incommensurability and mutual difference between the two epistemologies remains crucial in this research. Through recognizing this difference, we can also acknowledge how western ethnocentric

epistemologies might be used to carry out epistemological violence against the already vulnerable Adivasi Munda ontologies.

This can be seen under the concept of, "Ethical Responsibility", which for a writer means the subaltern to exist, by not taking over their voice, by allowing them to represent themselves through their own discourses and practices of everyday life. Spivak explains the act of responsibility as the act of response which completes the transaction of speaker and listener, but also the ethical stance of making a discursive room for the Other to exist. In other words, "ethics are not just a problem of knowledge but a call to a relationship" (French Feminism, 1981).

Adivasi territorial sovereignty is rooted in a distinctive culture or way of life, central to which is the relationship to the natural environment, and one of the main reasons Adivasi are so concerned about sovereignty, and controlling the movement of outsiders inside their territory, is precisely concerned about defending their territory. The elephant coming to the region in the villages often destroying their rice paddies and stampeding their house, this form of invasion made by the elephants, in the Munda consciousness is a Diku invading their lands. Just like the Neoliberal State in the form of sand miners, contractors, etc which are also currently invading their lands and violating their sovereignty.

This chapter focuses on the formation of Munda alterity, which is a result of communal living with Nature, land and forest and also living with the State. For them, this alterity underlines their relationship with the Neoliberal State. I argue that the relationship they share with the Neoliberal State is not completely antagonistic or binary in nature. Scholars have argued that the Adivasi have stayed in the periphery of the State and have always had

connections with the State. (Xaxa, 1999). These connections with the State were historically in the form of *Zamindars* (Landlords) coming to the region for taxes during the Colonial Raj or in the form of Adivasi men and women migrating for working as casual labor. From the 1990's onward, the initial period of neoliberalization in India has led to a number of new relationships and dynamics, including more Adivasis travelling for casual labor work; mining corporations arriving in the region; an increase of paramilitary forces; an increase in human rights violations; and large amounts of financial support by the NGOs and government of India, have altogether have shaped the Adivasi consciousness of how they comprehend the Neoliberal State and negotiate with it.

3.2   MUNDA ALTERITY AS PRACTICING UNTOUCHABILITY

As we were returning back from the Sunday mass at the church in Tapkara Bazar, Neeti and I happened to meet Merlina. We shook hands and I greeted her with the customary post-mass greeting "Jai Essu" (Hail Jesus). Merlina lived in Neeti's village and so she decided to accompany us as we walked back home. While walking back, she told us, "Did you know that someone in the village has stolen my hens?"

Merlina, a mother of three children, was a thin, tall woman in her early thirties. She carried a small cotton bag which hung from her shoulder, and held a big black umbrella in one hand that she used to protect her from the sun and rain. Slung over her back, all expertly swaddled in a cotton scarf was her ten-month old baby who was blissfully sleeping. Like many others who attended church, Merlina was also dressed in her best clothes and sandals. She wore a beautiful blue color saree with a golden border, and tucked her saree 4-5 inches above her ankle. Her hair was tucked tightly in a bun, which was adorned with a small red hibiscus flower. Merlina's husband had migrated to Punjab for work, and only visited her every Christmas.

While Merlina narrated her story, Neeti asked her, "What! How did that happen? When did you discover they were missing?" Merlina in an extremely upset tone said, "It just happened last night." She further added, "I need to provide eggs for my small children. How do I give them eggs now, I will have to save money and buy hens again?" Neeti nodded and consoled her, "Don't worry. Things will get better. God is with us". She added, "We all know who is behind all of this." I was puzzled by Neeti's response. How did she know who stole Merlina's hens? And how was she so confident in her statement? Although I was puzzled, I didn't question her. Neeti very confidently said, "Those Mallah people keep stealing our things from the forest also, who else would be doing this?" Nodding her head in agreement with what Neeti was saying, Merlina said "I will inform the Gram Sabha about this. That is all that I can do."

On our way back home, I kept thinking about Neeti's and Merlina's conversation. Why did they say it was Mallah and not any one from the Munda community? The Mallah people lived in the same village as Neeti's but were not Mundas. The Mallah *toli* (sector) was located separately on one side of the village. They had been brought to the village by Neeti's forefathers to help the Munda villagers cross the river, as the Mallah people possessed the skills to ferry boats. Traditionally, Munda society brought skilled people like Blacksmiths and potters from outside the Adivasi community to help with particular needs of the Munda Adivasi. The Adivasi would allow them to reside on a small patch of land in the village in return for their help.

Neeti and I often discussed the Mallah people in our conversations, but despite my insistence, Neeti was always reluctant to accompany me to visit the Mallah *toli*i. That was until one day, she finally decided to visit the Mallah *toli* after I insisted. On our way there she said,

"Pallavi, we will not stay there very long. It is not safe to go to Mallah *toli*". Knowing that she was already reluctant, I decided to accede to her advice. And, in a manner that emphasized her reluctance, Neeti further said "Baba should never come to know we went to Mallah *toli*." Neeti seemed more scared of her father knowing about the visit than the Mallah people themselves. She further added- "If Baba asks you about our visit, just lie to him." Both of us quickly fabricated a story to tell Baba for when we would return home.

As we walked to Mallah *toli* I asked Neeti, "Since you've been living in the village for so long, don't you have any friends in the Mallah *toli*?" Neeti replied, "I knew few of them when I was in primary school. They studied with me." She added, "After completing their primary education, they don't go to school. They don't want to study". Nodding her head dismissively, she said to me very confidently, "You will see for yourself". I then asked her, "Why do you think they don't study any further than primary education?" She responded rather curtly, "They just sit and drink all the time." I was very surprised by her reply. Neeti then went on to describe the Mallahs as dirty people living in unhygienic living conditions. She feared that she would catch a disease by just hanging out with them.

As we reached Mallah *toli*, I saw small huts standing next to each other and built on a very small patch of land. The layout of the Mallah *toli* was reminiscent of my time working in the slums of Delhi. The houses had tattered walls and roofs; living conditions were dismal. Although Munda houses in the village were also located adjacent to each other, they benefited from space to grow kitchen gardens and to keep their cattle. The living condition of the Munda household was much better.

In Mallah *toli*, we met Priyanka, who was washing dishes at the hand pump outside her house. She was a young girl who had recently returned to the village from Rajasthan. At the

age of twelve she had migrated to work as domestic help in Rajasthan. Her father was very proud of her as she constantly sent money back to her family through an agent who had helped her to initially get work in the city. She had recently returned back to the village, as she was now of marriageable age, and her family wanted to find her a suitor. Priyanka was one of the many village girls who found work as domestic help in cities. Networks of traffickers (so-called agents) moved around in the region and took monetary advantage of these girls. During my time spent in the village, I was often in the company of Priyanka and other girls. We would go fishing together, although I barely knew how to fish. Surprisingly, Neeti spoke highly of Priyanka - "She is so smart, wise, always neatly dressed up and never misbehaves with anyone". Neeti felt comfortable talking to Priyanka, but only because Priyanka had left the Mallah *toli* for a few years and was acculturated to the outside world.

I asked Priyanka, "What have you been doing in the village since you've been back?" In an irritated tone, she said, "What can I possibly do in this village?" Having already learned that the Mallahs only had enough land to live on, and no land to farm, her statement didn't surprise me. For livelihood, the Mallah heavily depended on their casual labor and the selling of fish they caught from the river. However, since the river was more of a stream, which would also dry up during the sweltering Indian summers, the Mallah could only fish during the monsoon season when the river was full. Like other Mallahs, Priyanka also collected forest produce and helped with farming Munda land along with her brothers. During our conversation, she mentioned that such farming work involved a lot of work and little wage compensation. She said, "I worked as casual labor in Punjab and earned much more. For helping Munda people in the field they only pay us in kind by giving *Hadiya* (rice beer) and cooked rice" Mallah's who otherwise were not invited by the Munda's in any social gatherings

were allowed to help Mundas in their farming activities. Priyanka seemed very frustrated that she was unable to earn enough for her living.

On our way back from the Mallah *toli,* we walked through the fields. Kids from the Mallah *toli* were playing in the empty fields. Even from afar I could recognize a few of these children as they were from the village school where I taught. Most of these kids displayed stunted growth, thin legs, protruding bellies and a loss in their hair color, turning their black or brown hair rust colored. One could easily and clearly see that children had marasmus and kwashiorkor. After undergoing several years of work on malnourishment in rural areas, I couldn't stop myself from later reporting these cases to the Auxiliary Nurse Midwifery (ANM) of the village, who also happen to be a Munda woman. Sadly, her response was like that of any other government official in the region - "I can't do anything. These people do not want to listen to us." The ANM rarely took any of the village cases seriously. In fact, in earshot of any sympathetic ear, ANM officials would complain about their own health issues. After numerous attempts of reporting these cases to the ANM, I finally gave up and reported these cases to local Right to Food (RTF) Campaign activists instead.

After a few days, in a wedding ceremony in the village, I asked Neeti and another friend Mukta, if anyone in the past had married or eloped with Mallah boys or girls. Mukta looked at me and said, "Are you stupid! Gram Sabha will throw us out of this village. We cannot marry any Mallah boy". I further asked Mukta "Why is there no one from Mallah *toli* here? When the whole village is invited, I cannot see anyone from Mallah *toli*?" She responded by saying- "they don't feel comfortable in participating in the village festivities. So, we give them raw rice, vegetables, and oil so that they can make their own food separately for feasting."

At that time, the local Adivasi political representative and Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) Babulal Marandi, built a bridge over the river to encourage tourism in the area. The consequence of building the new bridge was the loss of Mallah livelihood, in that their services of ferrying boats was no longer required by the Mundas. In addition to this consequence, the bridge also had severe consequences for the Munda as well. The building of the bridge meant the possible degradation of the river on which both the Munda and the Mallah rely, and it also meant unrestricted access of Dikus into the Adivasi region. During the Gram Sabha meetings that were held during and after the bridge construction, those in attendance would raise specific concerns over tourist crowds, sand mining contracts, and extraction of sand.

The Gram Sabha had recently started giving contracts to the Hindu elites living in the region to mine sand. These contracts were given by the Gram Sabha and were fixed by the Gram Sabha at a very nominal rate. According to the PESA act, all non-Adivasis, including the State, could not mine in the region without the permission of the Gram Sabha. During the recent Gram Sabha meetings, several villagers raised concerns over contractors mining more sand than mandated by the Gram Sabha. In many of my discussions with John, a village Chokidar locally known as *Hakwa* (Watchman), he mentioned the issue of illegal sand mining by notorious contractors. In one of these discussions, John irritatedly said, "These contractors are pricks! They will just end up ruining everything." John had worked for many years in a factory in Kerala and had recently returned to the village. He had a stout but thin frame, grey hair, wore old and broken spectacles and walked with the help of a wooden stick. John was responsible for keeping all the registers of the Gram Sabha. These registers included the register for the weekly meeting, the register for accounts, and a register for the Gram Sabha's

utensils and tools. He was also responsible for reminding people of any important dates, urgent meetings, and any other information relating to the Gram Sabha. In addition to his *chowkidar* (watchman) duties guarding the village, he would go around in the village announcing all the details at the top of his voice - this dual role was perfect for him. John took great pride in his work.

John continued angrily, "Yes I have noticed they are taking out more and more trucks of sand every day. Every year they do the same! They will ruin this river" He seemed both dismayed and frustrated. Not knowing what to say, I simply nodded my head in agreement. At the time, Priyanka and Neeti were also accompanying me. They started talking among themselves. He angrily looked at Priyanka and said, "*Iss ladkhi ne bhi dekha hoga* (This girl must also have seen it!). *Yeh Mallah log toh machli pakdne nandi ke pass aate jaate rehte hain* (These Mallahs often go to the river to catch fish)." Priyanka and Neeti were giggling at his angry reaction and said in a hushed tone, "he thinks of himself as very smart and can take all of Gram Sabha's time". Neeti then jumped into the discussion and said, "*Aajkal machli market main bechne jitna nahi hota hain. Ghar me khane tak toh hota nahi* (These days there are not enough fish in the river; these fish aren't even good enough to be sold in the market. It is not even sufficient enough for eating at home.)" She then added, "Contractor *bahut saare truck roj rait nikal raha hai* (The contractors are extracting many trucks of sand everyday)."

Over a period of time, the Gram Sabha weekly meetings focused primarily on the issue of more sand being extracted from the river. The Gram Sabha invited suggestions from everyone present in the meeting to address the issue; some villagers suggested fining the contractor for extracting more than what was allowed, while others suggested not to renew the contract for the next year. Some villagers also expressed their concern over the feasibility of

stopping local Hindu contractors from extracting sand. If the Gram Sabha refused to establish contracts to extract sand, then it would not be far-fetched to assume that the same contractors would use other means of doing this illegally. And so, they all agreed to establish a single contract with one person; in establishing a monopoly, they could ensure that other contractors would not come into the region. In order to finalize the matter, some villagers suggested summoning the contractor to the Gram Sabha in order to discuss the matter, however, it was finally decided that three or four Munda Adivasis would volunteer to go and meet the contractor. Gram Sabha announced in the meeting that those interested to volunteer should give their names to the Gram Sabha. In order to accommodate the villagers, the Gram Sabha also decided to pay for the commute of the four villagers who would go meet the contractor. Since the contractor lived in the Khunti town area, the villagers would have to bicycle fifteen kilometers to reach the nearest udikale panchayat area. From there, they would take an autorickshaw to travel to Khunti. Before concluding the meeting, the Gram Sabha decided to document in detail the irregularities and the terms of the contract, which would help the volunteers better negotiate with the contractor.

ANALYSIS

At first glance, the relationship of Mundas with the Mallahs in their village may resemble any other story of caste discrimination in India; however, in the present case it goes beyond simple discrimination. The relationship between these communities is much more complex and is premised upon maintaining the hegemony of the Munda alterity in that region.

As part of the Scheduled Caste, the Mallah community practices Hinduism, and are considered to belong to the lowest caste in the social hierarchy. Analogously, at the national level, the Adivasi are categorized as Scheduled Tribes and, like the Mallah, are treated by upper caste Hindu communities as impure and barbaric people. Interestingly, although the Adivasi

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complain about being discriminated against by the upper caste Hindus, they themselves practice untouchability against the Mallah community.

The paradoxical practice of untouchability as practiced by the Munda helps them to maintain their ontological alterity through clearly demarcating social, economic, and geographical lines between who is a Munda and who is not a Munda. The Mallah community lives in one corner of the village in dismal conditions. Living in the corner of the village has ensured that their interaction with the Mundas stays limited and that they cannot intermix with the Munda community. Similarly, to further restrict social interactions, Mallahs were not invited in the Munda festivities or social gatherings. In addition, their social interactions are reinforced by depriving Mallahs of land to use for farming, and by only providing them with small parcels of land for shelter. Lastly, the Mallahs have been restricted in their involvement in political decision-making processes of the Gram Sabha. This has not only kept them away from the power structures, but has also helped Mundas to maintain their hegemony in these communities. This, in turn, helps to maintain Munda sovereignty over their land. The irony of the Mundas using a Diku upper caste Hindu social practice, i.e. untouchability, may seem paradoxical at first, however, this practice for the Mundas has ensured that they can maintain their Munda alterity.

Munda alterity is deeply rooted in the Munda-only communal governance of the natural resources, which has helped them survive socially and economically as well as attempt to build a semi-autonomous society within independent, and then neo-liberal, India. But this in turn, has ensured the further marginalization of the Mallah community. For instance, for the Munda community, there is a collective understanding that Mundas will work on each other's farms to ensure everyone in the village has enough food to sustain themselves. Thus, everyone in the

village practices subsistence agriculture despite possessing fairly large patches of land. Since the Munda rely on the Mallah to provide casual labor on their farms, they have established a non-monetary system of compensating the Mallah for their labor by giving them Hadiya (rice beer) and rice at the end of each work day. In recent years, some of the Munda villagers also paid some money for Mallah help, and while these wages were fixed by the Gram Sabha, they have been kept very low. For the Mallah community, such payment, either in the form of Hadiya, rice or minimal wage, does not offer them enough security for their own subsistence and survival.

The ways in which notions of Munda alterity are challenged or enhanced is further reflected in different developmental projects and its impacts on different communities in the region. In this case, the Neoliberal state rears its head in the form of the bridge. The construction of the bridge has affected the Mallah community economically in two ways. (1) After the bridge was constructed, the Munda no longer needed the ferrying services of the Mallah, as they could cross the river using the bridge. (2) The increase in the number of outsiders coming to the region in the form of tourists and sand contractors has led to the degradation of the river. This degradation takes the form of fewer fish and crabs for the Mallah to fish from the river, which has meant the dual loss of livelihood for the Mallah.

For the Munda Adivasi, the presence of the bridge has brought about different concerns. The Adivasi are increasingly concerned about Dikus coming into their region. These outsiders challenge not just Munda territorial autonomy in the region by increase in the degradation of the river, thereby significantly affecting Munda coexistence with nature. For centuries, the institution of the Gram Sabha has facilitated communal governance of the river and land in order to address such issues. The discussion at the Gram Sabha meeting over concerns of sand

extraction is evident of Adivasi concerns over the exploitation of their river and the destruction of marine life's natural habitat. Their discussions around sand extraction have never revolved around selling the extracted sand for profit, or giving the contract for sand extraction to the highest bidding contractor - their decision around sand excavations has revolved solely around facilitating communal governance over land and resources for the benefit of the Adivasi, and in regard to Adivasi ways of life. As such, the significance of the Gram Sabha, and its role as an important site for decision-making, is deeply embedded in efforts to keep Munda alterity alive.

However, the exclusive nature of the "communal" decision-making process in the Gram Sabha is an important issue here, since it is controlled and dominated by Munda men. In the Gram Sabha, Mallahs are represented by only two or three men total, whereas every male head (or female alternate if male head is unavailable) of the Munda household is required to attend the weekly meeting. Of the Munda, those who do not attend these meetings are fined, and are shamed in the village. The presence of the Mallah at the Gram Sabha (albeit limited) is indicative of their effort to maintain a cordial relationship with the Munda people. As a result of not having any political agency to negotiate with the Gram Sabha, the Mallah have never demanded monetary wages to work on farms of Mundas. Similarly, during the Gram Sabha discussions on regulating the extraction of sand, the Mallah were not actively involved and nor were they consulted on negotiating with the contractor although they are directly affected by the sand extraction in the region.

Not discussing wages for the Mallahs ensured the status quo Munda way of living is maintained. Unlike the Mallahs, who depend upon casual labour for their living, Mundas exclusively help other Mundas on their fields, and practice subsistence farming, only growing

what they need for their own subsistence. However, specific boundaries were drawn between the Munda and the Mallah, and the system of giving rice beer and cooked rice in lieu of monetary wages for Mallah labor on Munda farms was controlled specifically by the Gram Sabha which did not take Malha perspectives in account.

The Gram Sabha's primary goals in dealing with contractors was to keep the State, and other diku actors, away and to maintain control over natural resources. By not involving issues connected to the Malha *Toli's* welfare, Mundas shrewdly focused on maintaining their territorial sovereignty, as they viewed saving the river as about them and not others. Altogether, the Munda relationship with the Malhas speaks to the importance of the Mundas' ongoing efforts to decide who is a part of the community and who is not.

Connected to this is the Gram Sabha's decision to negotiate a contract for regulating sand extraction is evidence of the Adivasi experience of living with the Neoliberal State. Based on prior experience, the Adivasi are well aware that the bridge would only lead to the flocking of Dikus in the region. In their experience, the best way to control Diku traffic in the region is to give the contract to one contractor, instead of establishing multiple contracts with different people. In doing so, they not only are able to exert more control over who can come into their region, but they can also regulate the amount of sand said contractor can excavate. Such a strategic decision is a classic example of maintaining semi-territorial sovereignty within the neoliberal State.

Furthermore, through their historical experience with Dikus, the Adivasi are aware that formal paperwork is an important part of negotiations with them. Amongst the Munda, they do not incorporate formal paperwork regarding the exchange of labor or goods. For the villagers, one's word is guarantee enough. However, in dealing with outsiders, the Munda are well aware

that maintaining formal paperwork is essential, in order to ensure they, and their resources are not exploited. It is for this reason the Gram Sabha maintain formal paperwork for the contractor; in doing so, they speak to outsiders in their language, but on Munda's own terms.

Together, these two stories speak to the fact that the Munda community's co-existence with nature is more important for Mundas than the existence or well-being of humans that they consider to be dikus. The Mundas are not interested in the exploitation of Mallahs, they are simply interested in protecting their river - a key part of their nature upon which they rely. In Munda terms, one does not cut a tree because you need the resources from the entire jungle - you only use the jungle as much as you need. Similarly, the Mallahs were tolerated for as long as they fished for their own subsistence, as they were not damaging the river, and they served a purpose to the Munda as ferrymen. However, with the arrival of the contractor, and the bridge, the Mallahs were no longer an essential part of Munda survival.

Neoliberalism leads to the strong assertion of Munda alterity, which, in this case, involves the marginalization of the Mallah community in order to maintain their territorial autonomy. For the Mundas, coexisting with nature is inherently linked to the material existence of their environment, which can only be preserved by Mundas maintaining their territorial autonomy.

3.3 ELEPHANTS, THE STATE, AND THE MUNDA COMMUNITY

Neeti's mom and I went to the jungle to collect fodder for the pigs. With the help of grass straw, Neeti's mom tied all the grass we had collected in small bundles. While I could carry only one bundle at a time, Neeti's mom expertly propped five bundles of grass atop her head. We began walking home. On our way back, she told me to hurry up, "Pallavi, we need to get back home as soon as possible...especially before it gets dark". She added, "This is the time of the year when the paddy starts ripening and attracts elephants." Walking quickly, with me

following close behind, Neeti's mom began narrating a story of how the elephants invaded the village the past year: "Baba was sleeping in the room at the front side of the house. In the middle of night suddenly I woke up to the sound of someone knocking at the window. Because the window was closed, I was not sure who it was. As the knocking continued, I got very terrified. I thought it's the *Maowadi* (Maoist) knocking outside again!"

She continued, "In the past, the Maowadi often visited the village at odd hours of the night to collect money and food. That night, I was initially not sure who it was knocking outside, since it had been a while since the Maowadi visited our village. Once I got over my initial fear, I decided to wake up Baba and ask him to check who was continually knocking. At first, we decided not to open the door. But then Baba opened the window to address the matter, and all of a sudden, an elephant trunk entered our house through the window! It took us by such surprise, we didn't realize what was happening, and we weren't sure what to do! Baba and I both ran towards the living room to wake everyone in the house. We knew that the elephant was probably very hungry, and would try to break inside the house to eat the rice we had stored in our storage room. I grabbed my grandchild who was sleeping, wrapped him up in a cloth and tied him to my back. Then the whole family ran out to the backyard and away from the house. We then started shouting and waking our neighbors to help us out. A lot of villagers woke up and were able to chase the elephant herd out of the village, but by the time the elephants left the village, they had caused so much damage, Pallavi! They also tried to break into our neighbors house and damaged their walls! One of the walls of their house broke and fell on their 2- year old child who was sleeping next to his mom. Poor thing. The next morning the parents of the child took her to the Khunti (45 km distant) hospital. The child had fractured her right hand and lost one eye. So much damage. The elephants also destroyed three

fourths of our yield. That's why last year was very difficult for us. We had to ask for help from Neeti's uncle who lives in the town. Uff, it was very bad. These elephants are very destructive and dangerous." Listening to Neeti's mom made me feel awful about how the Advasi villagers live in such vulnerable conditions. Not only are these villagers susceptible to wild animals, but they also live in anticipation of uncomfortable visitations by the Moawadi. For further clarification of villager experiences with elephant herds, I decided to have more conversations with other villagers. So, the very next day, I began a conversation with Neeti's neighbor Usha.

When I asked Usha didi to tell me about the elephant herds who come to the village, she shook her head in dismay and annoyance, and said, "Aadmi marr jai toh, Sarkar nahi aati. Par Haathi mar jai toh, Sarkar jarror aati hai" (If the man dies, the Government never takes cognizance of the loss of life. But if an elephant dies, the Government will definitely acknowledge this death"). In my conversation with Usha, I found out that Usha's father was killed by elephants. The day he died, he was returning back from the Weekly Bazar on his bicycle, having had consumed rice beer that day. An elephant herd crossing the road saw him and smelled the rice beer on him, and chased Usha's father. Unable to escape the elephants, Usha's father was stomped on by the elephant herd and died on the spot. Even when the Block office was informed of the death caused by local elephant herds, no one from the Block office came to visit Usha's family. In other instances where lives have been lost, or crop yields have been damaged, villagers have never received any compensation from the government. Acknowledging this, Usha said, "We know how to hunt wild animals. We have been doing this for ages. We can easily kill elephants coming into our region, but we choose not to kill them. I know many villagers also share the same sentiment with me. We just want to keep

them away from the village...not kill them. Only then can we get some peace and save both lives and harvest."

The next day, I was chatting with Neeti and some of her friends over dinner, when all of a sudden we heard the sound of firecrackers bursting and people shouting. As it was dinner time, it was pretty late, it was dark, and it was very unusual for any villagers to be outside. And yet, we continued to hear people shouting at the top of their voices, increasingly becoming louder. This din was accompanied by the sounds of firecrackers, the banging of utensils against pots, and the beating of drums. When I asked them what on earth all this noise was, Neeti and Amreen explained that earlier that day, groups of young people from the village had been guarding the fields from potential elephant herds in the region. Neeti explained further, "Our fields are in the middle of the jungle and there is no electricity. Each group will take one big torch and guard one area of the village. If they see an elephant, they will alert the rest of the village and the nearby villages by making loud noises, using utensils and whistles, and by throwing firecrackers." Nodding at me, Neeti added, "The Gram Sabha has given them this duty. If they see any elephants they make loud noises and call for everyone to gather in *Akhara* with their high beam torches, drums, and firecrackers. All of these are provided by the Gram Sabha to protect the village." Apparently, every household in the village was in charge of using and retaining one of these materials. Not only did the Gram Sabha purchase these items using its own limited savings, but they also kept a very meticulous record of which household had which item, along with their accounts.

I could see that many villagers, including small kids, women, young and old men had begun to gather over at *Aakhra*. Since it was a very cold night, people had draped their blankets and shawls over themselves for warmth. Some villagers also brought wood from their houses

in order to burn small bonfires for warmth and light, while others carried torches and portable lights in their hands. With the older people and kids staying back, the rest of the present villagers divided themselves into different groups and went off in different directions. Noting what was happening, Neeti said to me, "We will wait here." Eager to see what was happening, I told her that I also wanted to be part of those groups, but Neeti and her sister Amran both refused to take me. They said, "Pallavi, you may not be able to run fast in the dark Jungle." Although I was quite annoyed and agitated at their refusal, I didn't show them I was displeased by their concern. I took a pause and reminded myself of a fieldwork rule that I learnt in my Qualitative research classes at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). I knew that I had to listen to my contact person while doing field work, since they knew their lives and situations the best. Thus, I relented and hung back.

Trying to keep ourselves busy, we joined other villagers at a bonfire and chatted with them awhile, until we heard people yelling and firecrackers going off once more. Some of the villagers with us aimed their torches in the direction of the noise. One villager exclaimed, "Oh! They're in the next village!" I could see panic set in some of the villagers' faces. They had realized that the elephant herd was in the vicinity of the nearby village and would very soon be coming towards their village. From previous discussions with the villagers, I had come to know that in their hunger, elephant herds would eat, stomp and crush all the harvest in their paths of destruction through village rice paddies. Knowing that they had to take action, and quickly, some villagers soon ran in the direction of the elephant herd. For them, it didn't matter whose fields were being destroyed by the elephant herds - what was important was the fact that harvest was being destroyed. Even in the dark, I could see figures with beams of light emanating from their handheld torches quickly running towards the fields. Other villagers with

wooden sticks alight with kerosene oil and fire followed soon after. In the following hours, I came to know that the elephants had successfully been chased out of the village area. Later, my discussions with the villagers about the event that night showed me that this was not the first time that year that the elephants came into the village; rather they had been visiting the village every so often for almost a month. Due to the massive destruction caused to the rice paddies by each elephant herd, for the Adivasi Munda, each invasion was a big loss, especially since they grew small harvests on small patches of land for their own subsistence. It was for this reason that the Adivasis worked very hard during the day to harvest their paddies as soon as possible in order to save it from being destroyed by hungry elephant herds. And, even after their yields were harvested, their rice was still not safe from these herds. During my conversations with the villagers, they told me tales of how elephants could smell the rice stored in Adivasi houses, and would break the walls of houses to eat from their stored rice. Moreover, the frequency of such events placed all Munda villagers on high alert throughout the harvest season. Left with little choice, all the Munda Adivasi can do is to communally protect their harvests, surveil their lands, and drive the elephant herds away from the corners of their villages and back into the jungle.

A few days later around dusk, Amreen came back home from harvesting rice. One could see other villagers - men, women, the young and old, all returning back to their respective homes from harvesting rice. Some carried their day's harvest on bullock carts, on their bicycles, and in bundles on top of their heads. Although Amreen was carrying a now-empty bottle of water and a sickle in her hand, she was not carrying any harvest, as she had been helping out on her friend Svaita's farm. As Amreen entered the door and sat down, her son jumped into her lap to greet his mother. Like many other working farmhand mothers, Amreen

had also left her child in the care of her mother. After greeting her son, she asked Neeti and I to look after her child for a few minutes while she washed herself of the day's dirt using the hand pump outside. When she returned back, Amreen held her son once again, and began talking to us about her day. She seemed quite happy, as she told us, "We finished cutting all the paddy for Savita today." Amreen had been working on Savita's field for the last few days to help harvest her paddy. She jokingly said "We managed to do all of this before the elephants came." Like a few other folks in the village, Neeti's family had also completed cutting their harvest, and were now busy with filtering husk.

Continuing on with the conversation, Amreen asked me in Mundari, "*Mandi Jhum tanaien*" (did you eat the food?) Amreen was very witty and took great pleasure in testing (and making fun of) my poor Mundari speaking skills. Watching me struggle to put mundari words together, she again asked, "*Mandi Jhum tanana*?" I smiled and looked at her and said in Mundari, "*Hajum*" (yes) and "*hadoh ama cheena*" (what about you)?" Conversing in Mundari, we giggled together as I made a plate of food for her and handed it over to her along with a warm glass of water. For dinner that day, Neeti had cooked rice and *aloo gobi* vegetables (potato and cauliflower curry). This was a typical meal in the Munda household, where rice was accompanied with a bowl of either seasonal and locally available vegetables or watery lentil soup, and on some rare occasions - both. Obviously hungry from the day's work, Amreen sat on the floor and quickly began eating her dinner with her hand.

ANALYSIS

Munda villages in the region have been dealing with elephants invading their living and agricultural spaces over the last few years. These elephant herds destroy paddy yield and break into people's houses in search of food. In this search, they not only destroy the paddies, but also end up killing people. The Mundas have described the elephant invasions as a recent

phenomenon, because of the massive deforestation in local jungles, which has been undertaken by the neoliberal state for the purposes of development. This massive deforestation has subsequently led to significant losses in the elephants' natural habitat. During my many conversations with Munda villagers regarding the elephants, the Mundas have remarked that since the natural habitat of the elephant is being destroyed, they are unsurprised that the elephants are trespassing onto their lands. They often remarked, "As the paddy will start getting ripe, elephants can smell the sweet smell of the paddy and elephants will start visiting our fields". Along with hungry elephants, other wild animals have also begun appearing in the village - ones that typically do not appear in the region. In the duration of my stay, there were a number of instances where jackals have killed chickens, sheep, and goats. In one instance, a bear attacked an elderly man, causing the man to lose one of his eyes. However, unlike the elephants who would enter the villages only at the height of the harvest season, these other wild animals had begun appearing in the region at all times of the year. The difference in how Munda Adivasi treat elephants and other wild animals is informative of the relationship that the Adivasi share with nature.

Historically, the Adivasi have hunted wild animals for meat and medicine. Thus, these creatures have an important place in Munda culture. It is also quite common for the Adivasis to hunt those wild animals (like jackals) that attack their cattle or damage their lands. However, elephants are treated very differently from wild animals. On the one hand, villagers often opined that they could easily hunt problemsome elephants down. They mentioned during our conversations, "Elephants run slowly compared to the wild boar... we can easily hunt them down". And, yet, this community has strategically decided not to kill or hunt elephants - despite the fact that these creatures cause significant damage to both Adivasi life and essential harvest.

Such critical decisions are made by the Gram Sabha. During one of their meetings in the past years, when elephant herd invasions were becoming increasingly problematic as a result of deforestation of local jungles, the Gram Sabha decided that killing elephants would mean inviting the State to come inside their territory. In previous occasions, the State has been known to take severe action against the village when an elephant was found killed in the vicinity of the village. Such experiences with the administrative and judicial arms of the Neoliberal State has made the Munda more politically aware of the State's efforts to challenge their semi-autonomy and their ontological alterity.

Munda villagers see this issue as the State being irresponsible towards both the elephant and the Munda community. Here we see another case of the Mundas making conscious decisions over which actors, human and non-human, they consider as part of their larger community of coexistence. Maybe compare this to the Hindu right's relationship to cows. Is it different? You do not have to answer this here, but it might come up in the defense

As I have described elsewhere, some portion of the Munda Adivasi identity has been forged through their experience of living alongside and within different iterations of the State for centuries. Over the last few years, the nature of the State has changed from constructing a Nationalist identity (as begun by Nehru), to a Neoliberal State. This Neoliberal State has consistently made direct and indirect attempts to alienate Adivasis from their land and forest. Consequently, this region has also seen several movements led by the Adivasis to defend their land, both practically and ontologically from extravist development. Adivasi resistance movements have a mixed history of success in pushing back multinational corporations who came to mine on the land within the region. However, these successes have been short-lived, as one mining corporation's retreat is followed by another corporation's arrival just a few days

later. Of course, I am not saying that the Munda community succumbed to the neoliberal state and gave up their land. In fact, they were more than prepared to deal with the neoliberal development state, as is evident in their relationship with elephants. In the case of elephant herds, which the Munda Adivasi see as an effect of the neoliberal State, the Adivasi strategically and communally decide to chase these elephants out of their villages rather than kill these elephants, in order to keep the state away from their lands. They have been dealing with these practices of the State for several decades.

For the Mundas, saving the paddy yield is of utmost importance, not just for themselves as individuals, but for the whole community. The safeguarding of the paddy for the whole community is based in Munda alterity. The Munda Adivasi only grow as much as they need, and so they continue to practice subsistence agriculture. This means the farming is only done in a smaller field size despite having a lot more land. With elephants destroying their yields, such damage would mean that they would not have enough rice for the whole year. The rice for Munda people is not just another grain. For the Munda, the word for "rice" is interchangeable with the word for "food". In this sense, rice is the medium of sustaining their lives. This is evident in the common Mundari question as asked by Amreen: "*Mandi jhum Tanai*?" This can be translated into "Have you eaten rice?" but the literal translation of the Mundari term,"*Mandi*" is food (food in Munda society is considered sacred). Thus the local meaning of the term *Mandi* (rice) cannot be simply understood through literal translation. The meaning of *Mandi* as rice is deeply situated in the Munda Adivasi ontology i.e. in their alterity. The relevance of the *Mandi* (rice) in the Munda culture is described in the mythological stories and in their songs. This understanding of paddy is embedded in the Munda way of being and living.

Munda alterity was also visible in the communal solidarity on display when facing large issues that exceeded one individual's capacity to resolve. This was evident in the community coming together to face the invading elephant herds night after night. This was also profoundly visible in the way in which the community members helped each other to harvest rice as soon as possible, in order to avoid the destruction caused to the harvest by the elephant. Moreover, there are no wages or any form of monetary benefit involved in helping others harvest their yields - save for the appreciative sharing of harvest. The Munda alterity maintains this solidarity in the community, and the solidarity itself strengthens the community. In this way, community governance and decision-making is followed in an authentically Munda way.

Finally, the community has prioritized the safeguarding of their cattle from non-elephant wild animals, oftentimes choosing to kill wild animals that have attacked their cattle. Their choice not to kill the elephant is based on the Munda Adivasi understanding of the Neoliberal State (which could severely punish the Adivasis for killing elephants). For the Munda Adivasi, the Neoliberal extrativist state manifests as an elephant invading their Jungles and "land of the munda people". Their tense relationship with the state significantly influenced their decision not to kill the elephant, and instead prioritize safeguarding subsistence agriculture and also safeguarding their cattles from wild animals. This in turn helped them to maintain control over the Jungles and land which are closely linked to their existence.

3.4   STATE, ANIMALS, AND MUNDA SOCIETY

As the sun was setting, villagers were returning back from taking their cattle out for grazing. One could hear the dings of bells around the necks of their cattle along with the sounds of cattle as they headed back in herds. Shepherding their large groups of cattle, some villagers held wooden sticks in their hands to whip those in the herd who strayed away from their groups.

It was not very common to have shepherds accompany their cattle to graze, however it was harvest time of the year again and the rules were different. In order to govern the village during harvest time, the Gram Sabha had decided that no one could leave their cattle to graze in open fields until everyone in the village had completed harvesting their paddy. But this year, some villagers had decided to grow some other crops in their fields even after the paddy harvest was over. Thinking that all harvests had been completed, some villagers were unaware of this, and had already begun allowing their cattle to graze freely in their fields.

Neeti and I were sitting in the front yard. We saw Nandini, who was a good friend of ours coming out from Gram Pradhan's house which was adjacent to Neeti's house. She seemed very agitated. As she got closer, we asked her "What is the matter? Are you doing okay?" She replied, "All the new shoots that had just started to come out from the seeds we planted, and now they have been ruined by hens." She looked at Neeti and said, "You know it has been very difficult for me to farm anything. I barely get any time and I have to take care of my elderly mother." She seemed very upset. "I just went to meet Gram Pradhan to make my complaint. He said he will discuss the matter in the next Gram Sabha meeting."

Nandini was an unmarried, confident young woman who ran a tailor shop in the weekly market. Her father had passed away when she was very young. She had chosen not to marry, and instead lived with and took care of her elderly mother. Over time, I had become very fond of Nandini, and would often visit her at her house to play with her cats and talk to her elderly mother who always spoke of Nandini very proudly. So, seeing Nandini so distressed made me very concerned.

"Do you know who those hens belonged to?" I asked. Nandini replied, "It is very difficult to say whose hen it is since everyone in the village keeps a hen." Then I asked, "Didn't

you already harvest *Dhan* (paddy)?" I instantly regretted asking her my question because I could tell she was getting irritated and only wanted us to listen to her rant. Nevertheless she answered, "Yes, but I have also grown *Sarso* (Mustard) and *Arhar* (pigeon peas) for food." For a few minutes after, Nandini complained as Neeti and I listened to her quietly. Once she had calmed down, she left. It was only later that I learned that other villagers, like Nandini, also grew different crops after they finished harvesting Dhan. The next day, this issue was discussed in the Gram Sabha meeting.

On the morning of the Gram Sabha meeting, Neeti woke me up hurriedly, "Get up Pallavi! Wash your face, and brush your teeth. Baba will not be able to attend the Gram Sabha today. Hurry up! John (Chowkidar) rang the bell just now to call everyone to the meeting. We can't be late today." I quickly got ready. Neeti and I then hurried up to go to the *Aakhra. (*Aakhra is a place where a tamarind tree is found under which several stones are arranged, where all Gram Sabha meetings, religious functions and dances take place. The tamarind tree marking Aakhra has a special place in Munda culture and society. For the Munda people, a single tamarind tree represents the collective care of several generations, as it is not only nurtured by generations and has a long life, but it also provides shade to community members and has a cooling effect during the summer season.) By the time we got there, people had already started gathering for the Gram Sabha.

Squatting in a semicircle, members of the village were huddled together on that hazy morning. It is common for Adviasi people to adopt the squatting position and sit in this position for several hours. Because it was a cold morning, the attending villagers were clad in shawls and blankets, and some of them wore warm clothes like jackets and sweaters. Most of them were either barefoot or in their *chappals* (slippers) or sandals. Even in the cold winter months,

I rarely encountered any Adivasi people who wore closed toed shoes or socks to cover their feet. As is common for Adivasis during the morning time, some villagers were also chewing *datoon* (tree stem used for oral hygiene) in their mouths.

Surprisingly, there were a few women in attendance at the meeting. Generally, women in Munda society are prohibited from attending the Gram Sabha. They are not involved in or consulted in any political matters. In the particular village where I was residing, on the rare occasions where women only attended the meeting, they only did so if men of the family were unable to attend the meeting, if they were female heads of the households, or if a matter of the Gram Sabha directly concerned them. Despite being a woman myself, I had special permission from the Gram Sabha to attend their meetings only because I was an outsider and was only observing their discussions. During my time spent in the region, during most - if not all - the Gram Sabha meetings, I was usually the only woman in attendance, so, for a change, I was quite happy to see other women in attendance at the meeting.

The Gram Sabha meeting is always presided by Gram Pradhan, who serves as the village headman. Only those who belong to the founding lineage of the village have the right to become the Gram Pradhan. The headman of the tribe is also recognized by the Panchayats (Extension to Schedule Areas) Act, 1996 which gives the Gram Pradhan the authority to preside over religious, social, political matters. The Gram Pradhan of the village in the Munda Society is also exclusively known as 'Munda'. In many of my discussions with the villagers they expressed anxiety over who will become their next Gram Pradhan, as Gram Pradhan's son had passed away in an accident, and he only had two daughters. The core members of the Gram Sabha, like Gram Pradhan, and Gram Samiti members (a few people of the village elected to help the Gram Pradhan with the work of the Gram Sabha) had useful forms of social

capital. They were educated and could read, write and speak in Hindi. They also understood how the Block office functioned, traveled frequently outside the village, and were regularly in contact with Adivasi local movements and activists. Some of these members, like John the Chokidar, the treasurer, and note-taker were sitting together on an elevated stone slab along with the Gram Pradhan. The meeting discussion was conducted entirely in Mundari.

The Gram Sabha meeting began with John announcing the names of family heads of households for roll call. The note taker began taking down the names of all those family heads of households who were absent. When Baba's name was announced, Neeti stood up and said, "*Hazir hai*!" (I am present). As the roll call continued, villagers who had not attended the meeting last week were also depositing the penalty for missing the Gram Sabha meeting (Rs 5). The roll call and penalty were noted to maintain a record for the Gram Sabha, and because it was dishonorable to miss any meetings and to have to pay penalties for not attending the meetings, the villagers took it as a matter of utmost importance to regularly attend the Gram Sabha.

3.5   KHANIYOOS

As soon as the roll call concluded, the treasurer began collecting specific amounts of money from some of the villagers. He would call out, "Nelson Munda received *Khaniyoos* of Rs 120 (1.5 USD) by Jiten Gudiya for 4 goats! Dinesh Gudiya received *Khaniyoos* Rs 8000 (113 USD) for 4 pigs by Balbir Munda!" This method of announcing the penalties was to make it publicly known that 1) damage had been done to villagers' crops by animals owned by particular villagers, and 2) that penalties for such damage was now collected, and justice was restored.

Bahleen, a single woman in her late sixties who also served as head of her household, raised her hand. Gram Pradhan pointed at her to speak. She stood up and said, "In the monsoon, I tried to grow tomatoes and green chili. As the seeds started sprouting, Murgi (hens) came and

ate all the new shoots." Another villager by the name of Rajesh raised his hand and said, "How will we know who's hens are damaging our fields? The hens don't harm our fields as other cattle do." Other villagers began murmuring among themselves. Neeti whispered in my ear, "Rajesh doesn't know what goes on in the village. He migrated to the city at the age of twelve and has returned just now after eleven years." Neeti, later on, introduced me to Rajesh. He worked in a cement factory in Rajasthan and had been trafficked outside of the region by an agent. This agent used Rajesh's labor to send money to Rajesh's parents regularly - such arrangements were normal in the village. Another villager by the name of Makran raised his hand and began complaining to the Gram Sabha that the other villagers needed to take better care of their cattle. He added, "There is no other way to keep our yields protected."

Adding to Makran's point, Vimal, an old man in his sixties raised his hand and said, "I have only been farming on a very small patch of land. Last year pigs twice came to my field and destroyed a good chunk of the yield". Vimal was deeply upset. Vimal had a small frame, wrinkly hands and was wearing a lungi while covered up in a blanket for warmth. From what I knew of Vimal, he and his wife lived alone in their house. They had no children and so, greatly depended on their subsistence for survival. It was no surprise that Vimal seemed very upset at the loss of his yield, and the fear of losing this year's yield to cattle too.

Having heard enough complaints about controlling cattle and protecting yields, Gram Pradhan talked briefly with the men around him. After a few minutes, he looked at the villagers and said, "The Gram Sabha has requested all the villagers to supervise your cattle, and not leave your cattle free to roam." The Gram Sabha agreed on keeping the *Khaniyoos* (penalties for violation of Gram Sabha rulings) the same as last year. To ensure that future paddy harvests are not ruined by hens and pigs, the Gram Sabha additionally agreed that should a villager find

any hens or pigs (that do not belong to the villager him or herself) on their fields, they have the permission of the Gram Sabha to kill and eat the animals without penalty. This was done because it was obviously difficult to identify which cattle, hens, and pigs belonged to which villager. However, the Gram Sabha decided that if villagers were able to recognize the owner of the hen, pigs or cattle trespassing on their lands, the responsible owner would have to pay Khaniyoos to the Gram Sabha.

After a long discussion, it was also decided that everyone in the village should try to grow Arhar and Sarso after the paddy harvest is over. The Gram Sabha agreed on purchasing a motor to pump water from the village pond, so that villagers whose farms were far away from the pond could also pump and use pond water. This particular decision was made to ensure that everyone in the village would manage to complete their harvests at the same time. Finally, it was decided that everyone in the village would leave their cattle to freely graze in the field only after the harvest of the Sarso and Arhar kheti was completed, but only after official orders were formally issued by the Gram Sabha.

Other concerns were also raised during the Gram Sabha. Some villagers complained that local dogs were killing hens and baby goats causing great damage to their livelihoods. The villagers made it clear that some of these dogs were coming in from nearby villages, and other times these dogs were strays and could not be controlled by anyone. After some deliberation, the Gram Sabha decided to kill all the dogs in the village whether they were stray dogs or villagers' pets, since the distinction between the two could not easily be made. When the Gram Pradhan asked all attendees whether anyone had a problem, no one raised their hand. Two weeks later, there were no dogs in the village. One additional matter discussed at the end of the meeting was establishing the *Khaniyoos* for different animals.

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Table 1. *Khaniyoos* for Owned Animals who Trespass on Others' Land (Munda Gram Sabha, 2018-2019)

S .No	Name	Fine Rate for Trespass
1	Goat	Rs. 30 (0.40 USD)
2 a 2 b	Pig (during daytime) Pig (during nighttime)	Rs. 2,000 (2.9 USD) Rs. 4,000 (5.56 USD)
3	Ducks	Rs. 20 (0.27 USD)

I spent a few hours the next morning collecting Mahua flowers which had fallen on the ground with Neeti's mom. We tied up all the flowers in a big cloth and carried it back with us. *Mahua* flowers are dried and sold in the market to prepare local alcohol. Some Adivasi also made alcohol in their homes. On our way back Neeti's mom sang me songs of the *Mahua* flower and said these songs are very important for the Adivasi people. As we neared home, I saw Neeti's father in the piggery. Neeti's parents had made a small piggery outside their home where they kept three to four pigs. From a distance I could see Baba holding a wooden stick in his hand, with his lungi folded and tied up to his waist. For a moment I thought he was planning

to sell his biggest pig in the weekly market today but the squealing of the pig took away that notion very quickly.

Baba was chasing one pig around the pen and hitting it on its head. I must admit, as a vegetarian, this sight was quite shocking and traumatic. The other pigs were hiding in one corner of the piggery, out of sight. The pig that Baba was chasing continued to squeal until it was finally knocked unconscious. Once the pig was static, Baba started beating it mercilessly - I could now see that the pig was bleeding profusely. Now that he was sure that the pig would not try to escape, Neeti's father opened the piggery gate and let two villagers waiting outside to come into the piggery. Together, they used a rope to tie the unconscious pig upside down on a wooden stick. I had never seen anything so cruel before. I asked Neeti's mom where they were taking the pig. She replied, "They will take the pig to the river, clean it and then cut it into pieces. That will be distributed among the three of our families." Despite being grossed out, I asked Neeti if we could accompany them to the river. She replied, "We can't. Women are not allowed to do this." Somewhat relieved, I continued to think about the manner in which the pig was killed and about women being not allowed to clean and cut the pig at the river.

When Neeti's father returned home, I asked him, "Baba, why did you kill the big pig when you could have sold it off in the market and earned some good money?" He told me that the pig was growing old and would not have fetched a good price in the market. He further added, "I had to pay twice the *Khaniyoos* of Rs 10,000 to Gram Sabha because of this pig. It got loose and ran around outside the piggery and destroyed other people's yield. It looks very bad on our family at the Gram Sabha when people complain about my pig. Pigs destroy more yield than any other animals. It only made sense to kill it and use its meat."

ANALYSIS

In the face of the expansion of the Neoliberal State, the resulting challenge to their semi-autonomy, and the environmental destruction and degradation of the region's natural resources, all of which threaten their relationship with nature (and in turn their existence), Mundas confront the Neoliberal State through their practical and ontological alterity. In the wake of massive deforestation conducted by the State and corporations, preserving forests at all costs by not cutting trees for any reason has been of utmost importance. In all the Gram Sabha meetings, one thing that remained consistent was not cutting any tree in the forest for firewood or any other purpose. Community members were asked to collect the dried wood or wood from the old dying trees, thereby regulating the environmental damage caused by human need. In addition, if any person was found or seen cutting any tree, the Gram Sabha levied heavy penalties against them, disgracing the individual and family in the village.

Similarly, the ever-looming presence of the Neoliberal State has also meant that the Adivasi Munda people have to safeguard their community's agricultural output, which is crucial for their material survival. For instance, elephants and unpredictable changes in the weather destroyed their yield. The high penalties (*Khaniyoos)* for cattle and other animals is a reflection of stricter monitoring of paddy yields. *Khaniyoos* are also based on the relevance of particular animals for the Adivasis and the amount of destruction they cause to the yield. For example, since oxen are used for farming, there are no *Khaniyoos* on them, even though oxen are potentially more destructive than other animals like pigs and hens. In addition to the oxen's utility, they are very expensive. Similarly, *Khaniyoos* on pigs and hens come not only with a monetary penalty, but also potentially the loss of an animal, as villagers are allowed to kill and eat trespassing animals. Furthermore, although Adivasis rear both pigs and hens for meat, the *Khaniyoos* for pigs are might higher than those placed on hens, as pigs are capable of more

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damage to yield than hens. Thusm the development of the *Khaniyoos* are based directly on Munda practical relationship with cattle and other domesticated or wild animals.

Similarly, with the instance where dogs were attacking chickens and baby goats, the chicken and goats have more relevance for the Mundas as they are eaten for meat. For the Adivasi, dogs have zero utility. Unlike other domesticated animals, there were also no owners of the dogs (they were hostile street dogs) so the Gram Sabha found it difficult to control them. Since no one owned them, the Gram Sabha could not control the dog through *Khaniyoos*. As a result, in this situation, the best solution was to kill all dogs in the vicinity in order to protect domesticated animals. Livestock like pig, goat, sheep, and hens are also reared by the Mundas for an additional income, because they are sold at the weekly market to Hindu meat traders. The Gram Sabha plays a crucial role in upholding Munda alterity by prioritizing the paddy yield over cattle, which is not an income generating source.

In this situation, preserving the Munda's practical and ontological relationship with their land and environment is of the utmost importance for their survival. The communal governance of the natural resources like livestock, the river, and trees ensures an effective way of controlling Nature without exploiting it, the presence of which is critical for their existence. Thus, the Gram Sabha becomes an effective instrument of preserving Munda alterity. Furthermore, the Gram Sabha's decisions are deeply embedded in the ontological meanings of the mundane, of everyday life, and in the Munda alterity. For example, Munda villagers cannot explain the meaning of a tree or a river to the local administration as the ontological meaning for both are different for different communities. Here, the Gram Sabha plays a crucial role in keeping the Munda community together by resolving their disputes both efficiently and autonomously.

In neoliberal times, the Gram Sabha is more relevant than ever before. This can be seen in the new phenomenon of women who, acting as head of household in the absence of their husband, attend the Gram Sabha meetings. The presence of these women in the Gram Sabha ensures every household is aware of the current political economic situations and can follow the rules made during the weekly meetings. This ensures that everyone is politically aware of ongoing issues threatening and impacting the Adivasi community. However, this relevance remains ambivalent, as these women do not have much say in the Gram Sabha's decision making. The Gram Pradhan is a man, and only his son can succeed him, not his daughters. In this constellation of social relations, the Munda society is very patriarchal, as is evident in the limited political involvement of women. However, according to the Munda, this is part of their alterity, as it helps them to maintain the traditional structure of Munda Society.

In a similar fashion, the presence of the Malhas in the Gram Sabha meetings is to ensure they are aware of the functioning and decisions of the Gram Sabha, although they have not much to gain from their active participation or say. What is clear is that the decisions made by the Gram Sabha prioritize the Munda way of being and living over those of the Malhas'. This not only keeps the Malha's away from their integration in Adivasi power structures, but it also strategically maintains their marginalization. In this way, the difference between their ontological meanings is another way by which Munda alterity helps to maintain Munda territorial sovereignty and semi-autonomy - at least in part by choosing to limit some actors' participation.

CONCLUSION

Over the last thirty years, the Adivasi have uneasily coexisted alongside and within the neoliberal State. Their experience of living with the Neoliberal State have pushed them towards

safeguarding their Munda Alterity. The responses of the Munda Adivasi are sophisticatedly calculated to keep the State away and outside of their lands. Thus the Munda's decisions to protect their land, forest, and natural resources are intricately linked to their perceptions of their coexistence with nature.

The Neoliberal State has not just displaced the Munda Adivasi from their lands and forest, but has also led to an increase in the degradation of the natural resources, which directly threatens the Munda way of living. The ontological meaning of the Munda alterity is embedded in their communal living and also in their living lives based on subsistence. The Munda understanding of the differences between *Diku* and their own ontologies have further pushed them to maintain territorial sovereignty and autonomy.

4   CHAPTER 4: MUNDA ADIVASI WOMEN

One summer morning in 2017, I was buying a bottle of milk from the local dairy store when I saw a group of local Mundas gathered outside of the village police station in protest of the arrest of several Munda villagers. The arrested men had been accused of the alleged murder of five Hindu men who owned a stone mining company in the village. While investigating the matter with local police the next day, I found out that the murdered Hindu men had leased village land to non-local stone miners, forcing the villagers to pay rent on land that they collectively owned. The villagers' anger at this event had now culminated into the scene before me. Of course, while the protest itself was a rather tense situation to witness, I knew that this was not entirely uncommon for the area. There were significant tensions between Munda villagers and outsiders, who the Munda felt were encroaching on their land rights. As I watched the protest unfold, I heard the local Mundas protest, saying, "We all as a whole are responsible for killing them. You can put us all in jail!" In a show of defiance and strength, several of the villagers had sickles and other farming tools in their hands, shaking them at the police officers in protest and in anger. I was rather shocked to see that nearly two hundred villagers – men, women and children, had gathered at the station and were adamantly shouting "...Either you can lock us all up in jail or we all walk free!"

As I further investigated the events that culminated in the protest, I found that during a routine practice of erecting fences around their houses, Munda villagers had attempted to acquire stones from the local stone mine but were promptly stopped by the miners. These miners refused to allow them into the mines, arguing that the villagers needed formal permission from the government in order to take stones from the mine. The Munda were infuriated – in the past they had easy access to the mine as it was on communal land, but with

the change in the private ownership of the stone mine, their communal rights to the mine were now denied. Now, the national government decided to lease this land to outside Hindu miners, since all land in India is owned by it.

Angered at what they viewed as an illegitimate denial over their rights to the mine, the Munda told the miners to leave their land immediately. However, the miners would not. In response, the villagers swiftly held a meeting and collectively decided to hunt the miners, by driving them out of their territory. This approach to defending communal land rights is not novel to the Munda Adivasi – this community has a long and tumultuous history of defending their land from outside forces. Their tense relationship with the state intersects primarily with their identity as an indigenous community, and defines their struggle for land rights and indigenous sovereignty. The Munda Adivasi indigenous sovereignty is simply not recognized by the Indian government; this was most evident when the government first leased the stone mine located on collectively owned Adivasi land to the upper-class Hindu men. This tense relationship is further complicated by the fact that while the state refuses to recognize the indigenous community title of the Munda Adivasi, the Munda Adivasi similarly do not recognize the state as their legitimate sovereign.

This somber and most powerful event illuminated that, when pushed to the limit, Munda Adivasi women and men are willing to go to extreme lengths to defend their land from state and corporate actors. Although they do not often resort to violence, the Munda Adivasi are not opposed to doing so in order to protect themselves, their communities, and their lands from the looming threat of encroaching state and corporate actors. And, in this particular case, violence was deemed a necessary statement of indigenous sovereignty. Furthermore, it is important to note that both women and men protest and fight for their land rights together.

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Their struggle shows their emphasis on creating and maintaining community solidarity; as a community, all the villagers chose to collectively resist and kill the miners, protest the arrest of the alleged murderers, and collectively hold themselves accountable for the killing. In this communal effort to defend their indigenous identity and their rights to indigenous land, the Munda are defiant. Constantly faced on all sides by outside forces threatening to encroach upon their land, the Munda are living on the edge of survival, and for them, their land is central to this survival.

In this chapter I discuss how Munda Adivasi women who have fought shoulder to shoulder with Munda Adivasi men in movements against outsiders and the neoliberal state are active agents in creating Munda alterity. These women through their embodied knowledge of being both Munda Adivasi and women negotiate with and confront the neoliberal state as well as patriarchy from within the community. I argue that traditional feminist frameworks like intersectionality helps us to analyze the oppression facing these women as they have two identitites. What is missing in these frameworks, however, is the knowledge and resources that originate at the intersection of these two identities. Together, these in turn shape her as a political agent, her political choices.

4.1 THE PARADOX OF MUNDA ADIVASI WOMEN

As an integral part of the Munda Adivasi community, Adivasi women have fought alongside Adivasi men for communal land that they know and believe is theirs. In fact, Munda Adivasi women have often been at the forefront of all Adivasi land rights movements to defend their land from the neoliberal state and corporate actors. However, it is also critical to note that according to Munda Adivasi tradition, married women are not allowed to inherit land from their fathers. With most Adivasi women becoming married women at some point, land titles are passed down from father to son, or in the case of families with no sons, from father to

extended family members. In any case, in the Adivasi tradition, Adivasi women do not, and cannot inherit or own land. This critical tradition points out a central contradiction in the Munda women's fight for land rights, and begs the question that some feminists have raised: why are Munda Adivasi women in agreement with the Munda fight for communal land rights, which simultaneously denies these women their traditional land rights? Why do they not challenge this gendered form of exclusion? Understanding and unpacking this presumed contradiction was a central motivation for my research.

Indian feminists see Adivasi women's inability to inherit land as evidence of patriarchal dominance in the Adivasi community, and the internalization of this patriarchal dominance in Adivasi women. Thus, such feminists question why Adivasi women even participate in land politics that reinforce patriarchal practices. Gender and Development scholar Nitya Rao contends in her ethnographic work on Santhal women's rights, that land remains central in the formation of identity of both Adivasi women and men. She argues that the formation of identity for Adivasi men and women is gendered, in that they experience social realities differently. Adivasi men in particular, as Rao argues, have a "distinct advantage" (Rao, 2008) over Adivasi women in regards to the claim over land rights, as a result of their gender and social status in the Adivasi tradition. She acknowledges that Adivasi women experience significant hardship of labor while also mediating between their multiple identities as cultivators, Adivasi, mother, daughter, wife, etc. in their everyday lives. Such criticisms circulate in newspapers and academic journals, and are commonly raised in settings where Advisasi rights are discussed. They influence the way that Adivasi struggles are perceived, and the state's reaction to them, often providing part of the justification for repression.

While I appreciate Rao's recognition of the intersectionality of Adivasi women, I believe Rao's understanding of Adivasi women's support for traditional land rights falls short when she argues that for Adivasi women, their identities as Adivasi supersede their gender identities as 'women' in their claim for traditional land rights. Alternatively, I argue that both their identities as Adivasi and as 'woman' remain integral to their fight for communal land rights over individual land rights, mainly due to their relationship with their land.

I argue that Adivasi women do not support the fight for communal land rights because their Adivasi identities supersede their gender identities; I argue that the relationship that Adivasi women share with Adivasi land as both Adivasi and as women, is the reason why they choose to focus on fighting for communal land rights rather than fighting for individual land rights. I believe that Adivasi women are making a deliberate choice to stand alongside Adivasi men in the fight for communal land rights because their land sustains them, their children and their families. Their land is not only a source of sustenance, but it also maintains the reproduction of gender roles which they regard as integral to their identities as Adivasi women. I contradict the classic argument of scholars of indigenous land rights movements, who argue that the reason why Adivasi women do not fight for individual rights is because, although they feel discriminated against, they believe that fighting for individual or women's land rights weakens the fight for communal land rights. I suggest that Adivasi women see no contradictions in their choice to support the fight for communal land rights, because their land has a history of communal ownership, and is a source of sustenance for them, their families, and their communities. Furthermore, Adivasi women have developed a consciousness to fight for the protection of their communal lands as a result of the encroachment of the neoliberal state and corporate actors, as these agents threaten to disrupt their way of life as Adivasi

women. In this way, their identities as both Adivasi and as women play an equally profound part in their choice to fight for communal land rights, and in this fight lies significant agency as well.

During my fieldwork, I often found Munda women remarking, "How will we keep the land within our village and how will stop outsiders from taking our village land?" For these women, it was integral for village land to remain under the communal ownership and control of the villagers. The historical struggle of Adivasi men and women for communal land rights has sedimented the communal nature of the land for the Adivasi community, superseding the need for the fight for individual land rights. As such, Adivasi women follow this tradition, prioritizing their struggle for communal land rights over the struggle for women's land rights. However, western feminist epistemologies have failed to recognize why Adivasi women make the deliberate choice to defend their communal land rights which simultaneously deny them their individual rights. These epistemologies regard individual land rights as part of inheritance practices to be crucial for women's empowerment. Along these lines, activists based in Ranchi and Delhi expressed the same sentiments to me during my interviews with them. In one such interview, a female indigenous rights activist proclaimed the importance of including within indigenous movements, the fight for the state to provide Adivasi women with their rights over land inheritance. Activist affirmations such as these are often based on the agendas of funding agencies which choreograph their arguments according to contemporary western terminologies and trends. In her work, Chandra Mohanty (1991) contends that the west controls funding streams and makes decisions of investing funds in development projects according to specific terminologies that are based on western frameworks. The issue with using such terminologies or frameworks is that we fall short in accurately understanding populations, experiences and

social movements as they unfold on the ground. In the case of Adivasi women, using western feminist epistemologies to frame our understanding of their basic motivations for fighting for communal land rights is significantly problematic, as these theoretical frameworks have either defined the category of Adivasi, or the category of woman, but never the category of "Adivasi woman."

Examining the category of Adivasi woman, and placing her fight for communal land rights, her relationship to and understanding of land, and her role in the Adivasi community in the right context, is integral if we are ever to recognize the significant agency that she possesses in her fight as an Adivasi woman. For this purpose, then, it becomes crucial to understand who is an Adivasi, and who is an Adivasi woman – as well as what is an Adivasi woman's relationship to land. In my research, I look more closely at how we can understand Adivasi women's decision to support traditional land regimes, which simultaneously deny her the right of inheriting land.

4.2   THE ADIVASI WOMAN AND THE PLOW
On a rainy day during the monsoon season, Neeti and I were walking back home; we had just finished transplanting rice in the rice paddy for seven to eight hours. (Refer to Figure8-An Adivasi Munda Woman And The Author Transplanting Paddy Seedlings) It had been raining heavily, and we were exhausted. Our hands and feet were dirty with mud, and I had insect bites on my legs from standing in water that was 3-4 inches deep. As we walked towards home on a muddy path, I noticed a plow resting near a tamarind tree. I decided to touch it.

All of a sudden, Neeti shouted: "You will give bad omens to the village! All of our yield will fail". Noticing her distress, I immediately took my hand off the plow. This seemed to alleviate her anxieties a bit; then she explained, "Munda women are not allowed to touch the plow."

At the time, Neeti's reaction really unsettled me. I knew that I was not unsettled by the fact that she had shouted at me – she had shouted at me plenty of times before, and by that time I was very used to it. But this time, Neeti's shout had an ominous undertone – a seriousness which I had never come across before. My immediate response was disapproval at what seemed an obvious affirmation of a patriarchal gendered division of labor. The more I thought about it, the deeper this feeling went. In analyzing that day and recounting the many times I farmed alongside the village women, I reflected more on the relationship that Adivasi women shared with the plow as an agricultural tool, and what this prohibition meant for the women. I came to the realization that even as a most crucial tool for farming, the plow itself was simply inaccessible to Munda Adivasi women. And, because it was inaccessible, Adivasi women were left with no option but to rely on Adivasi men to do their agriculture for them. This renders Adivasi women, in the terms of the classical western feminist, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1898), "dependent on men for their food supply"--an inherently disempowering condition. The plow, as a tool, serves as a crucial mechanism for maintaining symbolizing the gendered roles and balance in the Adivasi community. It ensures the reliance of Adivasi women on Adivasi men for the purpose of individual physical as well as communal survival. In addition, the plow as a tool symbolizes the Munda community's connection to their land – without it they cannot farm, and without the sustenance from their land, their community will disappear.

As I write this dissertation, I continue to engage in the process of reflection, and analyze my own positionality in the field. I have come to realize that as a third world feminist who was trained in the West, I was trained to understand that women's empowerment and disempowerment is inherently intertwined with gendered divisions of labor and gendered distributions of resources, and thus are bound up with land entitlements. This incident caused

me to question this particular frame of thought, which assumed that women's empowerment requires an alteration of gendered social arrangements, and to ask whether land entitlements are indeed synonymous women's empowerment. If this is truly false and inapplicable to the Adivasi woman's relationship to her land, then why did Neeti stop me from touching the plough? Why did she react the way she did, and what did she mean?

As with many other Adivasi women, for Neeti, the elements of land sustenance and survival are of paramount importance and priority. On several occasions, Neeti had expressed to me, "What if the crop yield goes bad, what will I do?" For Neeti, the inaccessibility of the plow for women is more than just a patriarchal practice. Her faith in the Munda traditional systems compels her to believe that a woman touching the plow will affect her crop yield. For her, and every other Adivasi woman in the village, a low crop yield is a dangerous thing. A low crop yield will not only affect her individually, but it will affect the chances of survival for her family and her village. Thus, her belief in the traditional Munda system and the plow as an agricultural tool are symbols that offer an understanding of the meanings behind her relationship to her land, as well as her motivations for fighting for communal land rights, and support for traditional Munda ways of being. For Neeti, and other Adivasi women, the question of protecting communal land, and protecting Munda ways of life are a question of survival, and the sustaining of her, her family, and her village – not just herself as an individual, as if she were somehow separable from her community. It is in recognizing this, that we are offered insight into why Adivasi women choose to fight for communal land rights, and choose to maintain and reproduce patriarchal practices that western feminist epistemologies assume deny them their agency and their being as Adivasi women.

Spivak's work "French Feminism in an International Frame" has been fundamental in recognizing the agency and being of subaltern women like the Adivasi. Spivak argues that we only get to truly know women through "hyper reflectivity" and through acknowledging their situated knowledges and discourses. This critical notion has guided my fieldwork, and caused me to reflect on my own positionality among and understanding of Adivasi women. During my fieldwork, I actively engaged in many of the activities that Neeti participated in in her everyday life. I helped her in the kitchen and in the rice paddies, prepared children for school, went to the market to sell and buy produce and joined her in many of her other daily activities. Engaging in these practices as part of my ethnography not only educated me on the everyday practices of an Adivasi woman, but also educated me about the Adivasi woman's 'being'. I began to realize that the more I acknowledged the difference between myself and her, the more I could understand her clearly. It is the acknowledgment of difference, that I believe is most crucial to the practice of ethnography in indigenous communities.

In fact, Spivak offers us the term "radical alterity" of Otherness to help ethnographers contribute to a more ethical framework when engaging with subalternity. Spivak emphasizes ethnographers' 'singular responsibility' to discuss "ethics are not just a problem of knowledge but a call to a relationship" (Introduction to The Spivak Reader, 1996). In this emphasis, Spivak is arguing that we first ought to recognize that in our production of knowledge, we are engaging in an act of response which completes the transaction of both speaker and listener. Secondly, as ethnographers we have the responsibility to take an ethical stance by making room for the Other to exist. I have sought to embody this singular responsibility and ethical stance through a recognition of my positionality as an urban educated, privileged, English speaking feminist, who studies in a university in the United States. In addition, I keenly acknowledge the influence

of western worldviews on how I understand and perceive my subjects. I believe this acknowledgement has been most crucial in carrying out my research.

4.3   A DAY IN THE LIFE

It was early in the morning. My sleep broke as usual with the crowing of the hens, and the shrill sound of the utensils clacking in the kitchen. Of course, the village hens and the women were always the first ones to wake in the morning while the men were fast asleep. As soon as the hens would begin crowing at the top of their voices even before dawn broke out, the village women would have gathered around the village well. Since these villages have no piped water supply and no street lights, the women could not wash the day's dirty dishes at night. And so, they would gather at the village well every morning to wash the dishes and utensils they had used for dinner the night before. This was also the time when these women would fetch water from the well in order to prepare for their meals during the day.

That particular morning, I decided to join Neeti and the other village women at the well. As we made our way to the well, Neeti was chewing her *Datoon* (neem tree stem) to brush her teeth. She offered one to me and said, "I got this at the market yesterday, it is good for your teeth." I took the Datoon from her and started chewing it.

After washing our dishes and utensils, we collected water from the well and began walking back home. I could only carry a small bucket of water perched atop my head, but Neeti, although similarly petite in frame, could carry double the amount of water as I could. She carried her water, held her utensils in her hand, and continued to chew Datoon, as we headed back home in the shivering cold. I happened to notice several of the other women who were similarly walking back to their homes, carrying buckets of water on their heads with their dishes and utensils in their hands. Some of these women also had their children tied to their

backs with the help of a cotton cloth. Their children hung on their bodies, clad in a shawl which was draped around them and their mothers' bodies.

As the sun continued to rise, we walked back home through the fields and along the broken mud path that was framed on both sides with large, old trees. Neeti told me to walk faster. She said, "Walk fast, Pallavi. There are no vegetables at home, we will have to go and get "kandha" from the field. I asked her what *kandha* was, and she explained to me that "These are wild vegetables that grow underground by themselves on the earth. They help us during the days when there is nothing much at home to cook." She further added, "Only Adivasi people can find them, and today you will also learn to find them."

After we reached home, Neeti went inside the room at the corner of their house in which they stored firewood collected during the early winter days. All the village women and men went to the jungle to collect firewood during the seasons when there was no agricultural work to be done. These seasons typically took place during late January to March, when it was not too hot. Munda villages strictly follow the rule that you cannot cut a growing tree for firewood; you can only cut those trees which have died, or collect the branches of those trees which have dried up or naturally fallen on the ground. Once Neeti and her sister had collected all the firewood they needed, they went back home and put them in the storage area of the house. Neeti took the firewood she needed, broke them into smaller pieces, and began to make a fire in the hearth. She placed a big pot on top of the firewood, and began to heat up the water she needed to cook the rice for our daily meal. However, we still needed *kandha* for cooking, and so Neeti and I left home to go to the field located near the jungle.

As we hurried towards the field, Neeti was still chewing the morning's *Datoon.* Walking along the various fields, she identified for me the different trees, herbs, and flowers

that were growing in the fields in the winter season. After reaching the field, Neeti dug up the soil under a tamarind tree. I helped her to take the *kandha* out of the soil, when Neeti said, "Pallavi, we will only take out two and leave the rest in the ground, for them to keep vegetating." Once we had collected what we needed, we began walking back home, as Neeti complained about the rashes that she gets on her hands every time she cuts the *kanda* (Yam).

When we reached home, Neeti's mother asked her to hurry up and make their mid-morning meal, as she had to leave for the market to sell the rice they had been storing in the house. Neeti quickly washed the rice we needed for our meal, and put it in the now boiling pot of water. As she covered the pot with the lid, she told me that the rice was not going to taste good, nevertheless, we still had to eat the rice. I asked her why she said that, and she said "This the PDS (Public Distribution Center) rice. It doesn't taste and smell like the rice we eat at home." She added, "I wish Sarkar understood these things." *Sarkar* doesn't care about the ST people! (Scheduled Caste People)

As she was handling the *kanda* (yam) that we had collected, she first coated her hands in oil before taking a knife and peeling the kanda. I asked her why she put oil on her hands, and she told me that because the kanda causes rashes and made her skin itchy, the oil helped to prevent irritation from the kanda. She quickly peeled the kanda, chopped it up and then began to wash it. I told Neeti that you should never wash your vegetables after cutting them; all the nutrients get washed away. She smiled, and replied "I forgot again! I will not do it again."

She then added more wood to the *choolah* (stove made of mud in which dried cow dung cakes and wood is used to cook food), and removed one burning wood from the bigger

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choolah. She used a pipe made of iron and blew it to stoke the fire in the *choolah,* before she placed a wok on top of it. She then stood up from the place she was cooking and reached out to get mustard oil to add to the wok. After adding the mustard oil, she expertly chopped onion and threw it in the wok. By the time the onion was browning, she had taken out dried tamarind from the jar, showed it to me and said, "Pallavi, this is what Munda's eat. We know how to make a lot out of nothing."

She then added *kanda* to the wok and quickly stirred it. Sitting near the fire, she said, "There is no electricity for light, so we usually have to open the window for light when we are cooking." But, instead of opening the small kitchen window, she got her kerosene lamp and lit it up with a matchstick, saying "I have told mom to get more kerosene. We will need it at home for the light at night." Although there were electric poles set up in various areas of the villages, the supply of electricity to the village was very erratic. Thus, a majority of the villagers still rely on kerosene lamps, battery powered lamps and fireplaces for light. Most Munda mud houses have small windows for light, and sometimes no windows at all. Mundas have built and live in mud houses because these houses are kept cool in the summer and retain heat in the winter. Like other kitchens in the village, Neeti's kitchen also had a very small window, which let in minimal light during the day. Sometimes this light was not enough for her to do her kitchen work or cook, so Neeti would often have to rely on the light of the *choolah* or a kerosene lamp in the kitchen. The kitchen itself had a *choolah*, which is a stove made of mud. The wall behind the *choolah* was blackened by the daily ash of burning firewood. Hanging on this wall were also some old kitchen utensils made of iron, which Neeti told me they used during festivities. There was also a small table in the corner of the kitchen where they kept the washed utensils and the boiled water for drinking. Apart from that, in one corner near the

choolah, was a shelf where Neeti kept the mustard oil for cooking and spices like turmeric, salt, and spice mix. It was typical not to see too many utensils or furniture in Adivasi Munda kitchens.

As Neeti stirred the *kandha (*yam) in the mustard oil and onions, she again covered it with a lid. Neeti took some hot water and soaked the dried tamarind in it. After that she added salt and a spice mix that she had gotten from the market a few days earlier. Since the Munda are not very acquainted with spices, they typically use a spice mix, which is not the practice in most of the parts of India. She added some tamarind pulp to the *kandha* sag, and as the sag was getting ready she told me to keep stirring it while she went to collect mud and cow dung to spread on the floor of the house. I told her I wanted to come along, and so we lessened the fire, and went to go collect the cow dung from outside the house. I knew that this was part of a weekly ritual that Neeti had to carry out once a week to ensure that the floor in certain parts of the house didn't crack or degrade. She took the wet mud and cow dung we collected, mixed it with her hands and spread out the mixture across the one of the floors of the house, until the entire floor was covered. Neeti then wanted to wash both her hands and feet, and did so with the water that we had collected that morning. We then returned to the kitchen area, as the food was almost ready. Once it was fully cooked, she distributed the food into various plates, and handed each plate to family members sitting in the living room, who were waiting for their morning meal. We then also ate, but sat in the kitchen, and talked about what our day was to look like.

She told me that now, we would have to go to the rice field to cut paddy: "Pallavi, you know Baba! He will be mad at us if we don't get there in time." Housework and domestic duties kept Neeti fairly occupied, but she also had the daily responsibility of farm-work to

carry out as well. Neeti's father never counted housework as 'work'. He often scolded Neeti for being late or for not being able to contribute 'enough' to the farm-work.

After we ate, we went to the field to join the rest of the family to harvest the paddy. Once at the paddy, I saw everyone in the village - men, women, and children - collectively participate in harvesting. Once we reached the field, we used sickles to cut the paddy. I quickly learnt that with one hand you had to hold a bushel of rice paddy, and with the other you had to hold the sickle to cut the paddy. Although it was winter, the glare from the sun was rather unbearable. Neeti tied a cotton scarf on her head, and also told me to do it: "Pallavi," she said, "we will return back home in the evening. Tie it on your head or the sun will give you a headache." Neeti then plugged in earphones to play music as she worked in the field. We spent the rest of the afternoon in the field harvesting the paddy, with Neeti taking small breaks in between to get water for everyone working in the field. I enjoyed working with Neeti and her mom in the field, since they would tell me some rather entertaining stories of the village, and describe their lives in detail. Passing villagers would often make comments and crack jokes upon seeing me with a sickle in hand, working in the field.

On our way back home, Neeti carried some of the farming tools on her father's cycle. We saw that villagers were returning back from their fields with their sickles and other tools, along with the cattle that they had taken out earlier for grazing. Neeti's uncle who took out their family's cattle for grazing had not tied them together properly. Neeti shouted at him for his carelessness: "You don't know how to tie this doba properly, you will make us pay to the Gram Sabha". Neeti's mother saw Neeti arguing, and told me to ignore her. Neeti was tired and mad at her uncle, because his carelessness would only add onto her work. This was because

the village Gram Sabha fined families if their cattle trespassed on other families' farmland to graze, and this made families look bad in the village Gram Sabha.

When we finally reached home, Neeti began to make preparations for our dinner meal. She asked me, "Pallavi can you get me eggs from the hen house? I have to cook as soon as possible. The other women will start collecting eggs in the *verandah*, and Baba will be mad at me if the food is not ready by the time he gets home." So, I went outside to collect the eggs from the *verandah.* Admittedly, I was very scared of going to the Murghi house to collect eggs; I kept telling myself, "What if a hen pecks at me, or gets mad that I am collecting her eggs?" In the Murgi house there was a small mud pot hanging from the roof of the hut; this pot was used to collect all the eggs that the hens laid for the day. Although I was scared, and a bit upset at collecting the eggs as a vegetarian, I collected all the ones I could find and placed them in a small bag Neeti had given me. These feelings of discomfort were not new to me; they came to me several times during my fieldwork. In cases where animals as food were involved, I found myself engaging in a practice of reflexivity, reminding myself that for the Adivasi people, meat and poultry are the cheapest protein and food available to them. I realized that I had failed to uncondition myself – having been raised in a Jain family, it took me time to get used to the practice of eating eggs and garlic. With the practice of reflexivity, I came to the realization that for Jain and upper-caste Hindus such as myself, practicing vegetarianism is a luxury that we can afford as a result of our social status. I mostly kept my own diet, but adapted to some of the foodstuff available to the Munda Adivasi villagers.

I took the eggs I had collected back to Neeti and she placed them in the pot for boiling. On the other side of the *choolah* she was boiling a big pot of water for rice. In every Munda hut, there is usually one room where the Munda store their rice. They usually take rice from

this room for special events, family emergencies or a family feast. Neeti went into this room and took out a few cups of rice from a big bag that was covered with several layers of plastic and cloth. She told me, "Baba just told me some guests are coming to the house. They will be staying with us." And so Neeti added more rice to the water than usual and began preparing eggs for dinner. After dinner was ready, she then said that her Mom would distribute this to everyone when it was dinnertime. Since her work was now done, we could join the women who were at that time, congregated outside on the *verandah*.

I knew that in the evening, Neeti taught classes to the women and children of the village. Many village women would get together at night to learn basic English, Hindi, and calculation from Neeti. Some of these women were ailing grandmothers who despite having back pain and walking with the help of a stick, were still adamant that they wanted to learn these basic skills. These women were a part of the Mahila Mandal,a women's group which would collect savings every week and give loans to each other without interest to confront any big expenses. They also ran a small makeshift restaurant on the weekly market day to sell samosa and chai. As I was interested in understanding why these women were actively seeking to pursue an education, I asked my friend, Shaguni "Do you enjoy learning?" She said that since they had to sell their produce in the market, knowing how to speak English and Hindi, and make calculations was an important skill they needed to navigate the marketplace. Somari, another woman who came to attend the classes also joined in on our conversation. She said that learning these skills made her more confident while negotiating with middlemen: "They often fool us and tell us wrong calculations." I realized that for these women, a large part of their motivation for studying lay in their ability to educate themselves, and empower themselves by taking control of their difficult situations.

As Neeti finished up her class, it became dark. We then went inside to eat our dinner, which she put in two plates for both of us. I noticed and remarked that my plate had less rice compared to her plate. She then cracked a joke saying, "You are like a *Videshi Murgi* ("foreign hen") who eats so much less but has a lot of meat "(literally meaning, you eat less than me but I am smaller). "Look at me," Neeti said. "I work hard, and I eat well." Neeti's comparison of me to a *Videshi Murgi* was a friendly form of body shaming. But I laughed and ignored it, knowing these jokes meant I was getting closer to her, and moreover she was comfortable with me enough to tease me. As we were giggling and bantering back and forth, our friend Durga joined us.

My friend Durga had just returned from the nearby town after three months. Durga had completed a B.A. in history and had received vocational training in nursing, and often took temporary jobs with regional NGOs. Despite her education, she couldn't find any official jobs in the region. Similarly, Neeti was among those students in the village who managed to study and work towards a college degree. However, due to financial constraint she could not finish her professional course in teacher training, which ultimately prohibited her from securing a job as a teacher. She was among those few students who bicycled to school for 20-25 km every day, in addition to domestic duties and farm-work. However, for both Durga and Neeti, even a bachelor's degree in hand did not guarantee successful employment. I was glad to see Durga back, and we began conversing. Durga asked: "Why have you come to the village? Life is so hard over here."

To which I asked, "Why do you say that?" Durga responded: "People are idiots here, they have nothing to teach you." She further added, "We don't learn anything new over here. Also, farming is hard work with little to no returns." Neeti then added to our discussion, "For

a woman's life, life is very difficult, we fetch water day and night to cook and clean. We walk long distances often for collecting forest produce but do not get any returns. Pallavi, there is no piped water, no means of transport, and half of the time there's no electricity. If there are no woods we can't cook, because there is no gas cylinder. Mere survival is so difficult over here. How can one think of anything else?" I had nothing much to say to Neeti, but I felt puzzled. Did Durga and Neeti say what they said because they felt that working the land was a burden, or that the work involves drudgery? As I spent more time with these women I began to understand that in their villages, they wanted and needed basic necessities like electricity, piped water, access to better education, health care, and livelihood. Through these services, they could ease their own hardships, make the best out of their difficulties, and sustain themselves in their communities. Since many of these women couldn't find any jobs in the villages and surrounding areas, and since some of them couldn't complete their education as a result of their financial or familial constraints, their lands, the forest, and their knowledge of being Adivasi women were crucial to their sustenance and their survival as Adivasi.

ANALYSIS

   One day in Neeti's life illuminates important issues around the questions of Adivasi women's agency and to make choices. Naila Kabeer emphasizes that the question of women's agency should be understood in the form of access to resources, ability to make choices, and achievements. (Kabeer, 1999). For an Adivasi woman the answers to the questions of the agency are visible as they make decisions in their everyday life in their kitchen and field spaces. Further the question of a woman's agency is not limited simpy to access to economic resources i.e inheritance rights over land, it is also a part of daily experiences of autonomy, respect, happiness, decisions to stay in the village, etc. Kabeer argues, "resources include not only

material resources in the more conventional economic sense, but also the various human and social resources which serve to enhance the ability to exercise choice." In this case of Adivasi Munda women were making active political choices in their everyday life by using their knowledge of both as Munda Adivasi and as women to navigate the social-political milieu as a crucial resource.

4.4   RICE BEER

Neeti, Durga and I decided to take our conversation outside on the verandah. Because it was so cold, we made a bonfire of the firewood that we collected earlier during the day, and gradually, other girls also began to join us. In hushed but giggly tones, they began talking about boys and their relationships, discussing in detail the conversations that they had with their boyfriends. Neeti and Durga, much like some of the other village girls, had mobile phones, and were active on Facebook and Whatsapp, often relying on these apps to communicate with family members and boyfriends.

Amidst this giggly conversation, we suddenly heard the voice of a man shouting and cursing in Mundari. Nandini told me to ignore it, but I asked Neeti as to what was happening, and she told me that it was nothing unusual. She explained: "Bhalu often gets drunk and yells." Durga added, "And he beats his wife now". The others also looked at me, and chimed in, "In situations like this, if you sit quietly, you can't do anything…the Gram Sabha is aware of this. They have given several warnings to Bhalu for making so much noise, but until his wife complains, Gram Sabha cannot do much." Durga then told me with a somber voice, "Pallavi, you should have seen a few years back!, It was really bad." I asked her, "What do you mean?" Neeti explained: "Men and young boys used to fight a lot and make a lot of *shor* ("commotion") at night. But all the village women pushed the Gram Sabha to pass a communal law to ensure no rice alcohol is made or sold in the Village." Nandini then added to the discussion, "In the

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end, Hadiya is made and sold by the women. So, as women we decided not to make alcohol and sell it. If anyone wants to drink they can go to the market on the day of the market and drink Hadiya. At least, in this case, they don't drink all the time." I then asked Neeti, "Don't women drink?" She said "Yes. They do during festivities or on the market day. But again, they can't drink all the time." The other girls remarked, "Drinking alcohol means that these boys become *Kodiya* ["useless" or "lazy"] and they don't do any work. You see it every day. All of these boys just hang around on the *Kodiya chowk* [Chowk is the place to gather]". Some of the women began to laughingly complain at the uselessness of the men their age who often did hang out in groups at the Kodiya Chowk.

Although they were laughing at these *Kodiya* men, there was a little bit of contempt in the remarks of the women. As women who clearly valued hard work, these women looked down upon the *Kodiya* men, who despite being dressed in smart western clothes and shoes, spent a majority of their time gambling or playing games on their mobile phones. It was apparent to me that for both Adivasi women and men, education was not a guarantee for employment. However, there was a stark gendered difference in how they negotiated with the lack of employment opportunities. Women tried to get temporary jobs in the region as teachers or volunteers in project based jobs in local NGOs, or in some cases, as self-employed in the region. Those women who could not find employment at all resort to working full time in their homes and on their lands. However, it seemed that the men who could not find adequate employment, either could not or did not want to take on domestic responsibilities or farm work, and would thus resort to gambling in order to spend their free time in the village.

4.5 WITCH HUNTING

As the sun was setting, people returned with their cattle after letting them graze for the day. Neeti and I were sitting outside Neeti's house on the front stoop and were discussing village folk stories. Time went by, people continued to pass us by on their way back to their homes when suddenly we saw a man coming towards us. This man was bleeding rather heavily from his head and his lips, and was crying for help. As he came near us, he stopped and asked for water. Neeti's father came running towards us and told us not to engage with the bleeding man, Phagu. Hearing the commotion, other villagers also emerged outside of their houses but quickly retreated back after seeing Phagu. Phagu had cuts on different parts of his body; he had a rather large gash on his head, and both of his lips had cuts from which blood freely flowed. Phagu had apparently come running out from Gram Pradhan's house who had refused to help him. He said in his heavy, trembling voice, "Gram Pradhan doesn't want to help! He doesn't want to do anything. Please give me water." I must admit, this sight was rather shocking, and I was unsure of what to do. I was staying with Neeti, and had to abide by her father's orders not to touch or help Phagu.

Phagu was still bleeding, and yet no one else wanted to help. Knowing that I was unaware of village customs, even Neeti's neighbors were screaming at me not to touch him as they themselves were running back into their houses. Still unsure of what to do, Neeti and I were quickly ushered back inside her house by both her parents. We were all reeling from the scene. Upon asking Neeti as to what had happened and to explain what I had just witnessed, Neeti said, "Baba told me, Pallavi there are few things in our villages that is difficult to explain". Her mother added, "This is how things work in the Munda villages, these things have remained like this always."

Noting that they did not want me asking any more questions, I left the discussion there and decided that I would respect their feelings around the event and not push them. But, I was still immensely curious: "How could the people in the village who know each other so closely, decide not to help a fellow villager in pain?"

Over the next day I felt bogged down by my curiosity until I couldn't stay quiet anymore. That night, I begged Neeti to come with me to go meet Phagu at his house. We both promised each other not to tell her Baba, and not to let him find out. We quickly snuck out of the backdoor of the house. Sneaking out without telling Baba was an act that we were well versed in doing; nighttime was the only time Neeti had free to go visit her friends, but Baba never liked us going out at night.

With no street lamps lighting the street, we made our way to Phagu's house cloaked in complete darkness. When we reached Phagu's house we knocked on his door and his sister-in-law let us in.

Phagu was sitting near the *choolaah* to warm himself. He had bandages on his head, arms, and hands. Because of the cuts on his lips, he was unable to speak much, so his sister-in-law and brother began talking to us. They told us they lived in Khunti town which was nearby. As I couldn't help him the night before, it was a relief for me to see that Phagu's extended family was taking care of him. Phagu apparently lived alone by himself in his home.

Through our discussion with Phagu's family, we found out that there was a prior argument and tussle between Phagu and his neighbor Mariam. Phagu's family suggested that due to this argument, in an act of revenge, Mariam's brother attacked Phagu with an axe and injured him badly. Although Mariam's brother lived in a faraway village, he was infuriated at his sister

being hurt by Phagu, and so he arrived the night before with an axe to attack Phagu when he was washing his feet and hands after he had returned back from working his fields.

While I was relieved to see Phagu was doing better, I did feel as if I had not been told the full story. Surely if Phagu and his neighbor Mariam had a bit of an argument that wouldn't warrant a violent outburst from Mariam's brother. Why would someone attack Phagu so violently over what seemed to be a small argument? For context, I asked Neeti whether there was a land dispute between Phagu and his neighbor. Neeti replied, "They just keep fighting Pallavi! Even Gram Sabha has asked them to resolve them." Still unconvinced at the one-sided story, I decided that I would go listen to Mariam's side of the story and visit her the next night.

The next night, Neeti and I snuck out once more to go visit Mariam at her house. At Mariam's house, I saw Mariam lying on a thin cotton sheet spread over a jute mat on the floor, with two young girls helping her with water and food. Mariam's husband was cooking food – a truly unusual sight for an Adivasi man. Mariam's forehead was wrapped up in a bandage; one of her hands was also covered in white bandages. Seeing a woman in pain and distress made me very emotional. I didn't know what to say to initiate the conversation and so I said, "These girls are so pretty. Who are these small girls?" Mariam responded that, "These are my brother's children; he has sent them to help me out." Now making small talk, the girls served us with lukewarm water in steel glasses. I found this throughout my fieldwork in the Munda villages people boiled drinking water before storing it. I smiled at Mariam and asked her "You seem like you're badly hurt, did you go see a doctor?" In response, Mariam's husband replied, "I took her to the local doctor [again a fake doctor], and he told me to take her to a Khunti hospital." I knew already that the Khunti hospital was 40 km away from the village.

Despondent over seeing Mariam and her family in pain, I wrapped up our conversation and left.

That night as I lay in bed, I tried to piece everything together: Neeti had told me these people kept fighting with each other; the Gram Sabha had asked them to resolve their disputes amongst themselves; the Gram Sabha and other villagers can't do much and haven't done much to help either Mariam or Phagu. I still couldn't make much sense of these events.

By this time during my fieldwork, I had made many friends in the village and also knew how to get around. One day when Neeti was not home, I decided to visit Mangri on my own. Mangri was a middle aged woman with grey hair. Two of her three kids were married and living with their own families in the village. I really enjoyed visiting Mangri quite often; I could tell that she had taken a liking to me, as she would always give me hibiscus flowers from her garden to eat. In the same way I spent time with Neeti, I would also spend time with her in her kitchen as she cooked. That day, as I visited Mangri, it just so happened that one of her married daughters was visiting her as well. Her daughter had brought her child with her, and was complaining to her mom, "Every time I take my child to the village, he falls sick! He doesn't eat anything." She then told her mother that she was leaving for the market with her child, and would return back home late at night. Lamenting after the sick child, Mangri confided in me, "That child is sick because of Mariam – she has cursed our entire house." I was absolutely taken aback, but tried not to show it. I asked her what happened. She then explained, "First my husband went 'half-mad' and left me. One day he just went off, all alone outside of the village. He was always angry; he didn't talk to anyone and if anyone tried talking to him he just yelled at them. Of course, we never said anything to him or to anyone at that time. But, when my daughter died, my husband tried to fight with Mariam [attempted murder].

My daughter was very beautiful and young." She raised her hand to show me how tall her daughter was. She then said sadly, "One day when Mariam had visited my house, my daughter was sleeping on the *Khat* (cot). Mariam sat near where my daughter had kept her head. After a few days, my daughter started complaining about headaches. We went to several doctors [private fake doctors] from private to government in Khunti referral, but she couldn't be cured…and now every time my grandson visits me, he falls sick." It was at that moment that I finally realized the role of Mariam in this story. Mariam was the village 'witch' – the one who was considered by all local villagers, to be capable of placing curses on others.

I eventually learned that like Mangri's husband, Phagu had attacked Mariam several times in the past. However, I was shocked to know that Phagu and Mariam actually got along quite well in the past, before their violent interactions – they were good friends, treated each other with respect and exchanged food and gifts during festivities. It was only after Phagu started having speech and verbal difficulties, and was informed by the local shaman during 'treatment' that Mariam had cursed him as a witch that he began being violent with Mariam.

The role of the shaman has a crucial part to play in this entire violent episode. In my time at the village, I learned from Neeti's mother that when the village Shaman fails in his duty to cure a patient by praying to spirits, he then prays that the spirits guide him to the direction in which the village witch resides – because surely, if the shaman fails in curing his patient, there is a more powerful spiritual force that prevents him from helping his patients. Even as a staunch Evangelical Christian, Neeti's mother told me, "Our village Shaman is very good; he never says who is the witch, but always drops a hint as to who it might be…in Mariam's case, the Shaman of our village and a nearby village both pointed in the same direction. Since then, villagers have known about Mariam." I was very bothered by this notion, and so I attempted

to question Neeti's mother, and asked her, "If Mariam is a witch and places curses on people, then why hasn't anything happened to Mariam's husband or the Shaman?" Knowing that I had asked her a question she could not answer, Neeti's mother quickly changed the conversation.

I later found out that a number of the village women, including Shaguni and Durga, had been visiting Mariam's house (despite their suspicions of her being a witch) to ask after her health, and to help her with meals and housework. However, due to the Gram Sabha's strict rules on not interfering in Mariam and Phagu's issues, these women had deliberately chosen to visit Mariam's house at night. No one in the Munda village dared to go against the decisions of the Gram Sabha, as all villagers are expected to, and deliberately abide by the decrees of the Gram Sabha (See Chapter 2). In the case of suspected witches and witch hunts however, although the Gram Sabha believed in the idea of witch-hunting, they chose not to take action against suspected witches, due to local NGOs which took action against communities that actively practiced witch hunting. As such, the Gram Sabha not only refrained from publicly declaring that Mariam was a witch, but it also decided to not to take any action against anyone who attacked her.

In my investigation of this event, I can clearly identify this case and the fight between Mariam and Phagu as being an incident of witch-hunting. Witch-hunting, as I understood it through this incident, was a way of holding women responsible for any problem for which the Munda Adivasi did not have an explanation. In this particular case, these issues took the shape of Phagu's speech difficulties and Mangri's husband's mental health. If either of these individuals had received proper medical treatment for their issues, then perhaps there would have been no space for suspicion of Mariam as a witch who placed curses on village folk.

This incident also highlights the failure of the neoliberal state in providing adequate health care in Adivasi communities. The region of Khunti has only one government hospital which was only recently built, and lacks the adequate resources needed to cater to the large population of the region. As a result of its limited resources, unlicensed medical practitioners have found for themselves spaces within local communities where they can not only run small clinics, but call themselves 'professional' doctors. Therein lies a significant problem. These doctors are practicing pseudo-medicine, and providing their patients with expired medication, while also taking advantage of the villagers' money without providing them with adequate healthcare. Thus, it is not unsurprising why Adivasi villagers resort to going to the local Shaman in order to receive treatment for their ails and illnesses.

There is no doubt that the shaman of the village provides Adivasi villagers with spiritual and medicinal help. The shaman is always a man, and never a woman, and the villagers believe the Shaman as a sacred man, who prays to the spirits for their well-being and also has significant knowledge on how to prepare medicine from local herbs available in the region (I am in no way questioning the belief or traditional system of medicine, as practiced by the Shaman). When the Shaman's prayers and medicine fail to cure the patient, the Shaman provides the answer for his failure by suggesting that there are powerful bad spirits and curses at play that are preventing him from curing his patient. Almost always, shamans will place the responsibility of conjuring these bad spirits and curses on a woman. In blaming witches for his failure of curing his patients, the Shaman compensates for his "sacred failed masculinity" by not only blaming women, but by reproducing the patriarchal character of Munda village society. In addition, women who agree to the practice of witch-hunting are also engaging in a reinforcement of the patriarchy, which undermines the western feminist framework that

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assumes under a patriarchy, women are unable to exercise their agency at all. The agency of Munda Adivasi women is visible when they along with other men reinforce patriarchal systems, in this case witch hunting. The agency of these women is also visible when they resist patriarchy such as the "witch" herself. However, I would argue that in their reinforcement of such patriarchal practices, women are actually exercising their agency as Adivasi women.

4.6 THE FAILURE OF THE NEOLIBERAL STATE

It was market day, and the local doctor had finally opened his rather dilapidated clinic. Neeti and I were taking her nephew to the doctor, since he was feeling quite ill. After the checkup, the doctor gave Neeti's nephew some medicines, and much to my surprise, all the medicines given by the doctor were expired. When we returned, I couldn't help but tell Neeti that I didn't trust this doctor or his license to practice medicine. After two days of taking the doctor's medicine, Neeti's nephew was still sick with stomach pain and fever, so Neeti and I decided to go to the local shaman of the village. The shaman conducted prayers and gave us a list of herbs that he wanted us to get from the forest so that he could prepare the medicine. Neeti and I then went to the jungle to collect the herbs. And, although I was unable to recognize them, Neeti knew which herbs to look for, and we took them back to the shaman.

Although fairly simple, this particular incident highlighted some important elements of the relationship shared between the Adivasi and the neoliberal state. Due to the failure of the neoliberal state to provide adequate access to healthcare, Adivasi women are pushed to rely on traditional knowledge of the forest and forest produce. But, this shows how Adivasi women combat this structural failure through reliance on traditional knowledge systems. Furthermore, this particular incident shows the extent to which these women are embedded in webs of patriarchy and anti-Adivasi prejudice. The bureaucrat who made the decision not to fund the local clinic, the fake doctor, and the shaman: all are likely to be men, the first two likely upper-

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caste Hindus. In addition, the particular knowledge that Neeti had about the herbs was from the virtue of the fact that, besides trusting the shaman to produce a safe and effective medicine, she as a child had been collecting and using these herbs, fruits and vegetables from the forest. This knowledge came to her due to the fact that she has been part of the tribal Adivasi community and has taught from the knowledge that was passed down to her through a lengthy tradition of herbal medicine. Lastly, this entire incident impressed upon me the responsibility that faces Adivasi women; as Adivasi men migrate to urban areas for employment, Adivasi women are left behind to take care of their children, undertake the responsibility of agriculture work, and maintain the domestic duties, a majority of which is done in their kitchen spaces. And as these women slowly turn into heads of the household, with the increasing migration of Adivasi men to urban areas, they find themselves burdened with more and more responsibility – both domestically and agriculturally.

4.7   ZAKIR'S DADI AND CONCLUSION

During my fieldwork, I taught several classes in the local school, where I made friends with one student, Zakir. A frail face with a thin body, he was one of the sharpest students I had. He always had torn pants since his family could not afford any new clothes. "Make sure to hold the *Khajoor* (palm) leaves tightly," Zakir's Dadi, Saguni, said. "It's difficult but I know you can do it" she said. Exasperatedly I complained, "I can't, this is so difficult." gently encouraged me, "All you need is to practice but you can do it!" She smiled, "If I can do this in age you can certainly do it. Your eyes are better than mine."

Zakir's Dadi was a grandmother of five grandchildren and three children. Her daughter was married in a nearby village, and her younger son had migrated to the city for work. Her eldest son's wife had passed away, and after his wife's passing, her son eloped with another woman, leaving his five children in the care of his mother. To manage the responsibility of

caring after five grandchildren, Zakir's Dadi routinely sold *Khajoor chatai* (a mat made of dried palm leaves) in the market. She would also send her grandchildren after school to collect *Khajoor* leaves from the forest in order to make *Khajoor chatai*. After getting *Khajoor*, she would tear them into two halves and boil them in hot water. After boiling the leaves for a few hours until they were soft, she would dry them in the Sun and weave them into a *Khajoor* mat.

Making *Khajoor chatai* was not the only source of income for Zakir's household. His Dadi also had a lot of land in the village – but because of her advanced age and household responsibilities, she could not till the land herself. However, rather than allowing her land to go to waste, she opted for the practice of *Adh Batai* (a kind of shared cropping). A fellow villager by the name of Pawan and his family took the responsibility of cultivating Zakir's Dadi's land, and in return for her land, divided the produce equally among his family and Zakir's Dadi's family. The return from the land in the form of produce not only helped Zakir's grandmother to accumulate enough food to feed the family, but also allowed her to sell the extra produce in the market. Despite the hardship that she had experienced in her lifetime, I do not think I ever heard Zakir's Dadi complaining or discussing her life in a tone of self-pity. On the contrary, she was very enthusiastic about life and attended tuition classes at Neeti's house regularly. When I asked her about why, at her advanced age, she chose to pursue an education, she would say, "How will I know how to get the right price for my produce if I don't know how to count money?"

CONCLUSION

Adivasi women are in no way restricted from the use of land by Adivasi men; rather, they can access and use it, since they are an integral part of the Adivasi collective. Contrary to how western feminist epistemologies tend to view indigenous women, or women of patriarchal societies, the Adivasi women I had the pleasure of interacting with do not see themselves as

victims of the men in their communities – they see themselves as active, integral units of their societies who have the strength and duty to confront outsiders, businesses and the corrupt state. Their motivation for defending their land is the result of their relationship to their land; their land and forest is a source of their sustenance and their survival. Not only does their land have material meanings for Adivasi women, but as part of the indigenous Adivasi identity, their land also holds significant traditional sentimental values for Adivasi women. As such, their politics as Adivasi women, and their support and defense of traditional land regimes are all a culmination of the meanings that they attach to their land, and the relationship that they share with their land.

I argue that on the basis of the Adivasi womens' experience, the theoretical framework of intersectionality can best help us to understand the oppression faced by women of color – and in the case of the Adivasi women in this study, intersectionality can best help us understand the multiple oppressions that Adivasi women face on the basis of their gender and indigenous identities. In addition, their experience with oppression only becomes further complicated with the increasing influence of neoliberalism. As a framework, intersectionality is most applicable in allowing us to recognize and appreciate the situated knowledge that Adivasi women acquire as a virtue of their being. These women have navigated their rather complicated gendered, indigenous, economic, social and political situations with the help of their situated knowledge that derive from their dual identities as women and as Adivasi. I argue that Crenshaw's framework of intersectionality can best help us to understand their experience of subalternity but remains limited in nature. Crenshaw defines intersectionality as, "a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LBGTQ problem there.

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Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things" (2017).   I argue that the framework of intersectionality helps us to understand the double oppression faced by Adivasi Munda women but does not explain the embodied knowledge of these women which are due to the virtue of their being, as Adivasi Munda and as women. However, I paint a more complicated picture of Adivasi Munda women agency, in which she makes active political choices as a female head of the household. For instance, what seeds to grow? And what to spend families money on? Thus questions of agency for the Munda Adivasi women are not just about economic resources i.e. land, in this case is about how she chooses to support communal land rights over individual land rights. I argue thus the framework of intersectionality partially helps us to understand the Munda Adivasi women subalternity.

I would also like to raise the issue of western feminist frameworks in painting a picture of these women as victims. Such an approach to understanding Adivasi womanhood seeks to reproduce narratives of victimhood that seem to suggest that these women are unable to ever exercise their agency as a result of living in patriarchal societies. Western feminism would not say "there is no agency", but that the spaces for women's agency are very limited, and limited in an unfair, oppressive way, and that the gendered division of labor also oppresses them. This notion leads to the creation and reproduction of a false consciousness which posits Adivasi women as mere victims of patriarchal society. In this discussion of agency, it is important to critique the scholarship that looks at Adivasi women and completely ignores the long-lasting history of resistance in which these women have fought along with men to confront the State (Rao 2008). If these women were just mere victims, they would have not played an integral role in the planning and executing of these movements. Such scholarship completely ignores

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the contribution of these women, and their position as active agents in their own lives, by treating them as mere caterpillars with no agency. Such scholarship has failed to acknowledge the resilience, tenacity, and strength of Adivasi women which are the consequences of their everyday experience of navigating through a complex landscape of power. We need to acknowledge bot\h sides of the Adivasi woman. Thus, I argue that we need to approach our studies of the Adivasi woman by first engaging in an in-depth understanding of, "Who is an Adivasi woman?"

I argue that painting an image of an Adivasi woman as a victim, will not help us to represent her choices and agency. In this chapter, I have made an attempt to understand and listen to these women's discourse about themselves and have made an attempt to move beyond these western epistemological frameworks.

5 CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

GRAM SABHA AND NATIONAL ELECTIONS

One week, Kamal and John were asked to attend the district meeting of Gram Sabha representatives, on behalf of their village, Kochang. Kochang's Gram Sabha meeting started at 6 am and was heavily attended by the villagers. They were all listening to the Gram Pradhan carefully. I could see the anxiety among the attendees. The State repression in the past few months had brought fear as well as solidarity among the Adivasis in the area. The attack on villagers irrespective of their association with the Pathalgarhi movement had led to the decision to have a wider district-level meeting, which was being discussed here that day. The Gram Pradhan explained to the villagers, "As you all know, many of our fellow Adivasis are languishing in jail and today we all face the threat of arrest. Since sedition cases are lodged against the entire village. Situation in our village is not unique, since other villages in the region are facing the same crisis. We have therefore decided that we must coordinate with the Gram Sabhas of other villages and have a meeting at the district level. In this meeting, our main concerns and the strategies to combat the State repression shall be discussed. Kamal and John will represent us in the district meeting at Khunti. I must request you all to keep this information confidential in the village itself as any attempt by us to get together is being closely monitored by the State officials, so our district meeting must not be disturbed because of our carelessness. I now request you all to make contributions for arranging the logistics of the district level meeting." Villagers then proceeded towards the treasurer of the Gram Sabha and contributed the amount. The Treasurer wrote down the details and maintained the records in the Gram Sabha meeting register.

Though I wanted to attend the District meeting of Gram Sabha representatives from different villages, it seemed difficult considering the growing surveillance in the area. I later

attended the Kochang Gram Sabha following after the district meeting, where representatives updated the villagers about the district-wide discussion. John started to update the villagers about the discussion in the District meeting. John said, "the situation in our village is the same like others, everywhere Adivasis are being harassed, their land is being taken and this BJP government does not believe in our customs, traditions and customary laws." Representatives from other villages also said that the State government was taking away their land and bringing new amendments in CNT Act of 1908 to take away the Adivasi land and give it to the Dikus. The new land bank policy of the BJP government was taking away their common and forest land and planning to give it to the industries. Government has started listing the land in the land bank. No permission from Gram Sabha was obtained from any of the villages. Representatives from other villages also raised some important issues. In many places, a Scheduled Tribe (ST) certificate is not being issued to Adivasis even after an application from several months ago. All the villagers attending the Gram Sabha meeting agreed that this was being done deliberately to deprive Adivasis of their rights. Other representatives also said that in their villages, *Rashtriya Swayamevak Sangh* (RSS), an affiliate of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, was forcing Adivasis to convert to Hinduism and was also threatening Christian Adivasis for their religious practices. In some villages, churches were desecrated.

All the representatives were in agreement that this government was working against their interest and only interested in helping mining corporation companies. John said, "Munda villages should fight together and make sure BJP loses the coming Lok Sabha elections. It was decided that Mundas would field their own candidate. We must tell Adivasis how this government is acting against and the only way to save ourselves is to defeat them in the elections."

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In September 2018, in the run-up to the coming Lok Sabha elections Prime Minister Modi chose Jharkhand to launch an ambitious healthcare scheme, *"Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojna"*, and announced the construction of a new airport in Deogarh, Jharkhand. Surprisingly, there was no mention of the ongoing Pathalgarhi movement in his speech nor was there focus on addressing local issues of the Adivasis. BJP fielded an ex-Chief Minister of Jharkhand, Arjun Munda from Khunti, for a Lok Sabha seat and who later won by a thin margin. The victory of a BJP candidate from Khunti remains a paradox, as it is the epicentre of Pathalgarhi movement, which nominally fights against BJP-led neoliberal policies like land grabbing. Despite continuous attacks made by the BJP government on the Adivasis and the Adivasi Christian institutions, BJP also won with a substantial margin in other Adivasi populated regions in the 2019 national elections. Interestingly, we saw the opposite outcome in the Jharkhand State elections, where the BJP government lost the polls, while the JMM (Adivasi-centric party) won them. It is very unclear why the Adivasi would vote for the BJP government who was continuing attacking the Adivasi institutions in the national election and why they decided not to vote for the BJP for the State elections.

How can we understand the relationship between Munda claims to indigeneity and these results in State and national politics? How and why has the Munda community both supported and rejected the BJP populist government, even though it seeks to undermine,#[no comma] non-Hindu, minority claims, including formations of Adivasi autonomy and culture. To understand this paradox the study of politics of Adivasi self-representation becomes of paramount importance. The Adivasi politics of self-representation is embedded in their relationship they share with their lands and forest and how this relationship shapes the Adivasi politics. This research is an attempt towards that direction.

MUNDA LAND POLITICS AND THE PATHALGARHI MOVEMENT

The Pathalgarhi movement represents contemporary Adivasi politics and imaginaries. I argue that these politics have been shaped by the shared histories of subjugation and the resistance against the centralized State formation and actions. These shared histories of oppression and resistance against the State attempts to control Adivasi land through taxes, laws, '"governance," and neoliberal development have cemented the "us versus them" social cleavage between the tribal and non-tribal groups. Over the period of time the relationship between the Adivasi and the State have transformed from a binary to a much more complicated one. The key elements underlying this relationship are claims to citizenship and land rights. The Adivasi have a long history of fighting for their citizenship rights while also using claims to citizenship to advocate for access to health, employment and education and other human development resources. The Pathalgarhi movement was a response to the (i) changes in the policies of the State that attempted to facilitate the process of land grabs; and (ii) failure of the government to provide basic health care, education, and employment opportunities. The Pathalgarhi also reflects the centrality of the land in the Munda Adivasi community and compels us to rethink the study of the questions of indigeneity.In this study I have analyzed the meanings of land for the Adivasi community and how these meanings shape the contemporary Adivasi politics.

In post-independent India, the citizen-State relationship has been structured by the developmental State that explicitly aims to bring development to the poor in the form of education, health, food, and programs, but the government structure impedes the care it ostensibly intends to deliver (Gupta 2012). In the case of Jharkhand, these bureaucratic relationships have been dominated by the upper caste Hindu corrupt officials who often look at the Adivasi with as being "inferior," "primitive," and "stupid" which is embedded in their caste consciousness. This

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treatment of Adivasi has further deepened the politics of us versus them for the Adivasi Munda community. This is one of the areas that I would like to explore through future ethnographic research.

MUNDA ADIVASI AND LAND

I further explore in my research the Adivasi politics that is embedded in the question of self representations of being and becoming. The Adivasi being remains as an essentialist notion through which the Adivasi navigates the historical, social, and political milieu. The Adivasi Munda communities have been consistently living in the constant threat of losing their lands and forests to the neoliberal State and corporate actors which they consider critical to their survival and existence. I have shown through my ethnographic research of Munda everyday life that Munda altierty is shaped by Munda ontological meanings of lands and forests; and the Munda communities' constant interaction to negotiate with the neoliberal State to maintain autonomy over their lands. I argue that the Munda traditional systems and communal way of living remain bulwarks to navigate through the contemporary precarious political milieu.

However, in my discussion about the Munda ontological meanings of land and forest I have also shown the Munda connections to their animals. Munda communities' decisions of killing and rearing animals are based in Munda alterity which recognizes the criticality of communal governance of nature and lands for their survival. I argue that these decisions are not just based on romanticization of nature and forests. I would like to conduct a deeper ethnography of the intimate multispecies relationships between Adivasi communities and their animals, and how the Adivasi conceptualize the questions of indigeneity through the lens of Munda alterity. These

relationships represent the way Munda conceptualize nature and how these conceptualizations shape their politics.

Finally, I would also like to explore the importance of political ontologies #[I lost the sentence structure here; do you mean ",because understanding Munda land…"] for understanding Munda land politics is critical to further scholarship on the political relationship between the Neoliberal State and the Adivasi. How these ontologies converse with Western ones is an important question raised by scholars like Arturo Escobar. By putting those ontologies that are based in the Munda struggles for territory and understanding of land and forests in conversation with modernist frameworks, this can help us to more readily create a pluralistic ontological understanding of lands and forests between the indigenious communities and the State institutions. This can further reduce the chances of repeated epistemological errors that we knowingly and unknowingly keep committing

MUNDA ADIVASI WOMEN

As I explore the questions of indigeneity in my study, the one category which has been completely invisible is the Adivasi women. Munda women have always been at the forefront of the Adivasi movement. But these women have been missing from the debates of indiegenity. At the same time, scholarship has consistently ignored the category of Munda Adivasi women. This is in part because the choices made by these women of supporting traditional practices such as the communal land system are often seen by the scholars in the light of ethenic identity superseding gender identity (Rao 2018). I have shown in my research that these women through their simultaneous knowledge of being an Adivasi and being a woman practice food security as they negotiate with the Neoliberal State. I argue that we do not give sufficient attention to the kitchen

and field spaces where women have larger control and agency as we often assume that these women do not participate actively in the political decisions in a Munda society, for instance, during the Gram Sabha meetings. I also argue that these women have played an integral role in keeping the Munda community together as they confront the neoliberal State.

This research is a small attempt towards understanding the Adivasi women. Conceptualizing the relationship between the Adivasi women and her land requires much more in-depth ethnographic research of the spaces of the Munda Adivasi women. In the future, I would also like to include young Adivasi women and their political imaginaries, and the question of how and why we need to move from the paradigm of indigeneity and focus more on Adivasi women being and becoming.

FIGURES

6.1   FIGURE 1: PEOPLE GATHERED FOR PATHALGARHI MEETING

Thousands of villagers from several villages gather together to attend a Pathalgarhi meeting in Hakaduba Village, Khunti town.

6.2   FIGURE 2: TRADITIONAL PATHALGARHI STONES (*Sasandhiri)*

Traditional Pathalgarhi stones, also known as *Sasandhiri*. Traditional Pathalgarhi stones are an important characteristic of the Munda community. Traditional Pathalgarhi stones are inscribed in Mundari and have a family tree on them. The family tree helps to maintain the consciousness of belonging to their land alive in the memory of the Munda community.

6.3   FIGURE 3: PROVISIONS OF CONSTITUTION OF INDIA CARVED ON A PATHALGARHI STONE

Pathlagarhi stones used in the Pathalgarhi movement. These stones were placed outside every participating village, with specific provisions of the Indian constitution that provide legal protection forAdivasi land, inscribed on it. While the traditional Pathalgarhi stone is written in Mundari and is just for the community, stones from the movement are written in Hindi to be able to speak to the government. Munda people ensure that they clearly communicate their demands with the State. This picture was taken by the author after the State ambushed the peaceful Pathalagarhi movement meeting. The bus standing near the Pathalgarhi stone was a CRPF (Center Rapid Peaceful Force).

6.4 FIGURE 4: PATHALGARHI STONE COMMEMORATING MARTYR "AMIT JOSEPH TOPNO"

The Munda Adivasi commemorated those who they considered martyrs of the Pathalgarhi movement. Since 2018 due to state violence many Munda Adivasi have been killed. This Figure was clicked by a Munda community member and friend who wishes to remain anonymous.

6.5   FIGURE 5: SCHOOL BUILDING, REMATA VILLAGE, KHUNTI

Dilapidated school building in the Remata village where I conducted my fieldwork. The building has potholes in the floor, no electricity and no furniture. One woman served as both principal and teacher, responsible for teaching 1st to 5th grades.

6.6 FIGURE 6: DAYAMANI BARLA, A PROMINENT INDIGENIOUS RIGHTS ACTIVIST ADDRESSING A MEETING

Dayamani Barla, a prominent Indigenous rights activist addressing a Koel Karo Andolan commemoration. This picture was taken by the author in 2017.

6.7   FIGURE 7: MUNDA MEN TILLING THE LAND

Munda men tilling the land with the help of oxen under the scorching sun. This work is carried out before the monsoon to prepare the land for planting.

6.8   FIGURE 8: AN ADIVASI MUNDA WOMAN AND THE AUTHOR TRANSPLANTING PADDY SEEDLINGS

An Adivasi Munda woman and the author transplanting paddy seedlings. This work requires one to bend down for several hours in the slimy muddy water. Women often sing Mundari songs together while transplanting saplings as they work in groups.

6.9   FIGURE 9: AN ADIVASI MUNDA WOMAN SELLING BAY LEAVES

An Adivasi Munda woman selling bay leaves she collected from the jungle, at the local market.

6.10 FIGURE 10: AN ADIVASI MUNDA WOMEN GOING TO THE WEEKLY MARKET TO BUY FOOD

Adivasi Munda women going to the weekly market for food, with children tied to their back, an umbrella in case it starts raining, and a bag full of empty bottles to fill with kerosene for cooking. These women have to walk at least 8 kilometers each way to reach the market. The market day is considered a happy one as the marketplace is the spot for meetings, socialization, and enjoying locally-made sweets and snacks.

6.11 FIGURE 11: AN MUNDA ADIVASI WOMAN WHITEWASHING HER MUD HOUSE

A Munda Adivasi woman painting her mud house by herself. Usually this work is considered male work in Adivasi and Hindu communities.

6.12 FIGURE 12: ADIVASI MUNDA WOMEN AND THE AUTHOR MAKING DISHES OUT OF SAAL LEAVES

Adivasi Munda women and the author making dishes out of *saal* leaves to prepare for a Christmas celebration. These women go to the forest together to collect the leaves.

6.13 FIGURE 13: SCHOOL TAKEN OVER AND TURNED INTO BARRACK BY THE PARAMILITARY FORCES IN KHUNTI

This picture was taken by a friend who would like to remain anonymous.

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