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Abstract

As adivasis become increasingly visible as subjects in debates around conversion, identity, indigeneity, and development, the field of "Adivasi Studies," centred on the subject of the adivasi, becomes increasingly relevant. As a newly emerging field, it engages with archaeology, anthropology, agrarian history, environmental history, subaltern studies, indigenous studies, aboriginal studies, and developmental economics but adds to these debates that are specific to the Indian context. This essay discusses some of the imperatives that make a revisit to the field of Adivasi Studies compelling. It engages with the ongoing dialogue amongst those who write the adivasis into the larger project of history-writing, and sets out the markers of the field of Adivasi Studies from a historian's perspective. It reflects as much some of the dilemmas that one faces while engaging with the field of Adivasi Studies.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In 2017, the Jharkhand Legislative Assembly passed, without adequate discussion and debate, the most contentious of amendments to the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act of 1908 that had aimed to protect the customary rights of the adivasis to land.[1] In response to the proposed amendments to the Act, there were large protests across Jharkhand from different quarters of the society, and regional and national political parties like the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, All Jharkhand Students Union and the Congress, which compelled the government to reconsider the Bill.[2] For adivasis facing displacement, forced resettlement, and loss of rights to forests in Jharkhand today, "*jal*, *jangal* and *jamin*" (Sharma, 2001, p. 4), or "water, forests and land" has emerged as an evocative rallying slogan supported by rights activists, large sections of civil society, and non-governmental agencies.

Mere vignettes from a much larger canvas of events, these recent episodes, drawn from the state of Jharkhand,[3] reveals how a variety of interests are played out in a complex scenario that postcolonial India encapsulates. Surely, at many levels, adivasis are being increasingly marginalised, their interests waived aside. Yet, amidst all of this, there also lies a story of the assertion of adivasi agency: voices of adivasis, although multiple and fractured, can be heard as they assert their identity, express their politics and creatively negotiate with the state and its institutions. Adivasi

communities, we need to recognize, are differentiated amongst themselves along several axes: access to education and government jobs; patronage extended by political parties, non-governmental organizations and religious groups; identification with Christianity, the Sarna Dharam,[4] local practices or Hinduism; claims to resources and ritual importance based on lineages and patterns of migration etc. Adivasis, then, claim their identities at different levels, pointing to the interleaving and mutability of pasts and presents.

But how are we to understand adivasi communities? The term "adivasi," translatable as "original inhabitants," came into use for the first time in 1938 in a political context, with the formation of the Adivasi Sabha in Jharkhand (Hardiman, 1987, p. 15; Bosu Mullick, 2003, pp. iv–xvii.). By claiming for themselves a long tradition of "insurgency" against colonial rule for their rights over land and against economic exploitation in postcolonial times, adivasis enjoy, in the language of Banerjee, "a kind of political hyper-visibility - a hyper-visibility quite disproportionate to their numbers" (Banerjee, 2016, p. 140). Adivasi, as a term, is distinct from Scheduled Tribes; as Xaxa has argued, adivasis, through bonds of emotion, view themselves as belonging to the same community irrespective of whether a group or a segment of it is listed or not in the constitution as "Scheduled Tribe" (Xaxa, 1999, p. 3595). Yet, paradoxically, in demographically enumerating the adivasi population, references are made to available data on Scheduled Tribes (See, for example, Shah et al., 2018). Moreover, while tribal communities confined to the Fifth Schedule areas in eastern, central, western and southern India identify themselves with the politically assertive term "adivasi," for those living in the north eastern part of India and governed by the Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution, the category of Scheduled Tribe or tribe is acceptable in the pan-Indian context.[5] In fact, adivasis from Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Odisha, who went to Assam in the nineteenth century to work at British tea plantations, are not recognized as Scheduled Tribes in areas governed by the Sixth Schedule.[6] Scattered across India in geographically differentiated terrains, pursuing different occupations, speaking different languages and inheriting different trajectories of historical development, these communities have varied experiences as they inhabit many worlds. For example, tribal communities in the North-East have historically enjoyed a greater degree of economic and political autonomy, resulting in relatively higher levels of education, employment and health facilities. Dealing with adivasis, we need to recognize then, is spatially limited: this inability to arrive at a pan-Indian adivasi self has been responsible for the disaggregated nature of adivasi politics. At the same time, the literal meaning of adivasi as "original inhabitants" enables these communities in Fifth Schedule Areas along with tribal communities in the North-East, to position themselves, strategically and politically, as Indigenous People in the global arena (Rycroft & Dasgupta, 2011b, p. 2).[7]

As adivasis become increasingly visible as subjects in debates around conversion, identity, indigeneity and development, the field of "Adivasi Studies," centred on the subject of the adivasi, becomes increasingly relevant. While I do not argue for an inevitable linearity, the genesis of many of the debates around adivasis can be traced to the pre-colonial and colonial pasts, and this is where Adivasi Studies must begin. And since "development," or the lack of it, has been the paradigm through which adivasi communities have been viewed by the Indian state and its allies, this is a field that is inextricably linked to the present. Many of the issues raised are contentious and controversial, embroiled in ongoing debates. Academics engaging in Adivasi Studies must engage with what is happening on the ground, with contemporary articulations of adivasi identity, and this is what makes Adivasi Studies so open-ended and fluid, its terrains ever shifting. As a newly emerging field, it engages with archaeology, anthropology, agrarian history, environmental history, subaltern studies, indigenous studies, aboriginal studies, and developmental economics, but adds to it debates that are specific to the Indian context. Adivasi Studies, I argue, is distinct from "tribal studies," traditionally taught in the departments of anthropology, where there is little critical engagement with the hegemonic terms upon which tribal studies rests (Rycroft & Dasgupta, 2011b, p. 3). And this is despite the disquiet expressed by early anthropologists like F.G. Bailey (1961), Surajit Sinha (1965), N.K. Bose (1971), S.C. Dube (1977), and also Andre Béteille (1974) who emphasized the importance of moving away from established "text-book definitions of the tribe" (Béteille, 1974, p. 68). Today, in the last decade and a half, Adivasi Studies is emerging as a vibrant field. Woven around the adivasi, several monographs and essays in edited volumes have been published (Prasad, 2003; Rycroft, 2005; Banerjee, 2006; Ratnagar, 2010; Shah, 2010; Bhukya, 2010;

Rycroft & Dasgupta, 2011a; Pati, 2011; Das Gupta, 2011; Chandra, 2013; Bates & Shah, 2014; Das Gupta & Basu, 2014; Carrin, Kanungo, & Toffin, 2014; Dasgupta, 2016b; Radhakrishna, 2016; Sen, 2017; Bhukya, 2017), along with journals like *Adivasi*, a journal of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute Bhubaneswar, and the *Journal of Adivasi and Indigenous Studies*. Courses on adivasis and ideas of indigeneity are being taught in departments of history and at research centres in universities that study "minorities" and ideas of discrimination and exclusion.[8] What then are the imperatives that make a revisit to the field of Adivasi Studies so compelling? This essay makes no claim to be exhaustive in its arguments, or inclusive of the corpus of literature that has emerged in the field. It has a limited objective: it is part of the ongoing dialogue amongst those who write the adivasis into the larger project of history-writing, and sets out the markers of the field of Adivasi Studies from a historian's perspective. It reflects as much my own dilemmas as I engage with the field of Adivasi Studies. Writing history, as has been repeatedly emphasized, is a political act (Eley, 2005, p. 5). In the case of Adivasi Studies particularly, it is important to analyze the contending "truths" that are produced, the claims that are made, the politics that is expressed.

2 | THE MANY MEANINGS OF "ADIVASI"

A critical issue that has confronted adivasi communities and scholars who engage with adivasi studies is to explain their choice of the term "adivasi" over the contending categories of "tribe," "Scheduled Tribe" and "Indigenous People," often conflated in common parlance.[9] Since these terms are neologisms and are products of distinct genealogies (Karlsson and Subba, 2006), for academics and non-academics, the choice of which nomenclature to use is usually a careful, political one. There is, after all, a specific politics behind bestowing a forced conceptual unity on categories that have their own sets of limitations. Let me, very briefly, discuss these terms.

Tribe, particularly from the mid-nineteenth century, is primarily seen in colonial records as a stage in an evolutionary schema, a type of society that was different from caste societies, marked by primitivism and backwardness. Of course there were shifts within this broader understanding that were related to, among other things, the working of official minds; changing assumptions of race; tensions within the discipline of anthropology and its application in the colony; ideologies of governance and the imperatives of rule; and interactions with the "native" populace. For academics like Damodaran, colonial discourse, rather than conjuring imaginary landscapes, analysed real landscape differences: the colonial stereotype of a simple tribal people who needed protection against exploitation thus had a historical basis (Damodaran, 2006, p. 44). Others like Devalle, Skaria and Guha (Devalle, 1992; Guha, 1999; Skaria, 1997), emphasize the hitherto fluid and interconnected relationships between social groups in the pre-colonial and early colonial period which were erased with the idea of tribe.

"Scheduled Tribe," distinct from the word "tribe" and yet drawing upon many of the parameters through which the colonial category of tribe was structured, is a legal and constitutional category. It is rooted in the state's concern to address the issue of the protection, welfare and development of the tribal population (Xaxa, 2016, p. 35). Post-independent India, as Xaxa has pointed out, has been more concerned with the identification of tribes [or rather Scheduled Tribes] than with their definition; the criteria for identification—geographical isolation, simple technology, backwardness, the practice of animism, differences in language or physical features—were neither clearly formulated nor systematically applied (Xaxa, 1999, p. 3589).

Very different from the idea of tribe is the global category of Indigenous People. There is, Muehlebach writes, a "remarkable consistency" in the "cultural political arguments" of those who identify themselves as Indigenous People: these are people who are represented as victims of conquest and colonisation, who have been dispossessed of their sources of livelihood, are facing decimation of their collective identity and hence culture shock. From their experiences and memories of "genocide," stem the claim of Indigenous People to their rights. To quote Muehlebach, "In part, this consistency has its roots not only in the histories of oppression shared by indigenous peoples, but in the

carefully crafted discourse developed over time that has enabled them to speak jointly of this oppression" (Muehlebach, 2001, p. 421).

There are others like Beteille who have warned us against the use of any of the above categories (Béteille, 1986). Niharranjan Ray suggests the use of indigenous terms like *jana* (non-monarchical societies outside the hierarchical *jati* system) (Ray, 1972 p. 123). Guha advocates the restoration of operative categories in precolonial Indian society; "the forgotten indigenised term '*khum*' might serve for all ascriptive social categories, both tribe and caste" (Guha, 2015, pp. 50–57). Attempts to treat neologisms as ontological verities, Chatterjee argues, are rooted in particular colonial and ongoing postcolonial attempts to erase complex precolonial political, military and economic relationships and histories (Chatterjee, 2016, p. 9).

What then is the specific politics behind advocating the choice of adivasi, a category that came into force in as late as the 1930s and which bestows a shared identity to diverse communities? Those scholars who have preferred the term adivasi and engaged with a newly emerging field of Adivasi Studies have, in the last decades, been assessing the relevance of the nomenclature in a variety of contexts. Indeed, the meaning attached to adivasi, and consequently studies woven around the adivasi, have changed with historiographical shifts, disciplinary interventions, and with politics as it operates on the ground. More recently, adivasi resistance has gained a new currency with the emergence of indigenous rights movement across the globe (Guha, 1999; Shah, 2010), the neoliberal developmental initiatives of the Indian state (Padel & Das, 2010; Nilsen, 2013), and the ultra-left underground Maoist insurgency in the country (Shah & Pettigrew, 2012; Sundar, 2016).

One of the earliest to privilege adivasi over tribe, was David Hardiman. Unlike tribe which has "strong evolutionist connotations," the term adivasi, he argues, relates to a particular historical development—that of the subjugation in the nineteenth century of a wide variety of communities which before the colonial period had remained free, or at least relatively free, from the control of outside states. The influx of traders, moneylenders and landlords, who had established themselves under the protection of the colonial authorities, taking advantage of the new judicial system, deprived the adivasis of large tracts of land (Hardiman, 1987, p. 14). Adivasi resistance, then, is to be understood in terms of opposition to the *sarkar-sahukar*-zamindar nexus (a collusion between state, moneylender and landlord) (Guha, 1983, p. 8) which connoted inevitably a history of adivasi subjugation and difference. It is this that gave adivasis a sense of collective identity (Hardiman, 1987, p. 14). Yet, not all who shared a common fate identify themselves as adivasis, writes Xaxa, who is critical of Hardiman and other "radical scholars" of his ilk. Xaxa talks about "adivasi consciousness": the realization of adivasis that they have no power whatsoever over "anything (land, forests, rivers, resources) that lies in the territory that they inhabit" (Xaxa, 1999, p. 3595). It is this "aspect of marginalisation that is to be taken note of while designating a group as adivasi" (Xaxa, 1999, p. 3591). Damodaran links with the adivasi the idea of indigeneity. Recognizing this link is critical at a moment when "the marginalisation and proletarianisation of many forest-based communities and the demise of their traditional livelihood gains pace all over the world" (Damodaran, 2006, p. 162). On them has been wrought, argue Padel and Das, a "cultural genocide" or "the killing of people's culture by uprooting them from their ancestral lands" (Padel, 2009, p. 334).

In a new historiographical turn, however, the category of adivasi is increasingly seen to be embedded in a politics of representation. In this frame, the adivasi is seen as a modern subject negotiating with modern state power (Chandra, 2016; Dasgupta, 1999), displaying plural identities that are "radically contingent, impermanent, changeable habitations" (Sarkar, 2011, pp. 66–67).[10] Bates and Shah underline the necessity for a historically, socially and politically situated approach to the ways in which particular forms of resistance are depicted as adivasi at particular points in time (Bates & Shah, 2014, p. 2). Rycroft and Dasgupta emphasize the need to recognize that different social groups, by referring to themselves as adivasi, stake their claim to material and symbolic resources. This imparts to the term a legitimacy that is difficult to ignore, and yet which needs to be reviewed, embroiled as it is in a host of historical and representational contests and controversies (Rycroft & Dasgupta, 2011b, p. 2). Recognizing the politics of "becoming adivasi" (Rycroft & Dasgupta, 2011b, p. 3) would help us identify the multiplicity of events, sites and representations through which the concept of the adivasi is,

and has been, constructed and negotiated (Rycroft & Dasgupta, 2011b, Preface, p. xiv). It is this idea of "becoming adivasi" and not just "being adivasi," I argue, that accommodates "the range of multiple histories around the singular subject of the adivasi" (Sarkar, 2016, p. 155). Scholars of Adivasi Studies must unravel the pasts of those we designate today as adivasis, and recognize the continual remaking of community boundaries. For this, unpacking missionary narratives, ethnographic reports and anthropological writings produced in the colonial period, which have resonances in the postcolonial, is an imperative. We also need to revisit the colonial stereotype of the irrational, unchanging and primitive rebel with his bow and arrow, forever on the verge of revolt, a myth which continues even today. It was in order to counter this image that Jaipal Singh, a Munda leader of the Jharkhand Party, had sarcastically stated during the Constituent Assembly debates on the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Constitution: "I am very sorry to disappoint … that, in supporting the Fifth Schedule, I did not dress in my bows and arrows, the loin cloth, feathers, earrings, my drum and my flute … (Constituent Assembly of India Debates (Proceedings), 9,132,219).

3 | IN THE VOICE OF THE ADIVASI

Today, there is a new dimension that Adivasi Studies is grappling with as the academic world has begun to reflect on and increasingly engage with the voices of the adivasis which, in Hansdak's words, had been "shrouded in polite silence for too long." In this new turn is emphasized the need to move beyond analyzing just "the claustrophobic confines" of adivasi identity which was imposed on them by "the colonial administrator, the colonial anthropologist, the missionary" (Hansdak, 2017). One needs to rethink the production of knowledge about adivasis by unpacking majoritarian voices which silence the marginal ones, and recognize the impact of "neo-liberal, neo-imperialist forces that rule global economy today" in destroying adivasi lives (Hansdak, 2017).[11] Ruby Hembrom, Publisher, Founder and Director of Adivaani (first voices), an archiving and publishing outfit of and by adivasis, powerfully expresses this when she talks about "Reclaiming the Reproduction of Adivasi Knowledge" through "the lens of an adivasi." Deliberately translating "Adivasi" as the "indigenous peoples of India," she writes that adivasis have always been the *objects of writings* (emphasis mine); these accounts have been *an outsiders' view*, *not of them and by them* (emphasis mine) … (Hembrom, 2017a).

These voices are assertive. There is a celebration of "being adivasi": adivasi identity is seen as a "source of strength and celebration, instead of shame and silence" (Hansdak, 2017). Many years ago, Bishop Dr Nirmal Minz, a public intellectual and activist, had expressed this sentiment: *Garv se kaho hum adivasi hain* (Say with pride, I am an adivasi) (Kujur & Minz, 2007, p. 9). What we have today is a concerted attempt from large sections of the community to collectively assert such claims. But there is also "Angst" (Hansdak, 2017), a display of sentiments of hurt and anguish against a history of dispossession from traditional rights over resources, aggravated by extreme deprivation and exploitation. Under these circumstances, what would empower adivasis is an acknowledgment of the relevance of their identity in today's world. "Adivasi systems of knowledge and alternate modes of livelihood are more holistic and show sustainable ways to the future, and if we do not recognize this, we do so at our own peril," writes Ivy Hansdak (Hansdak, 2017). As Xaxa has incisively pointed out, the identity that was forced on adivasis from outside, precisely to mark out differences from the dominant communities, is now internalized by the adivasis themselves. This imposed identity has become "an important mark for social differentiation and identity assertion" and "an important tool for articulation for empowerment" (Xaxa, 1999, p. 3589).

Let me pause for a moment to draw a parallel with the critical turn that has taken place within Dalit Studies since the 1990s when dalit voices were inscribed into what were earlier seen as studies of lower castes and of untouchability. With an emerging educated dalit intelligentsia which now refused to be passive subjects for academic scholarship, the new demand was for experiences of the trauma of untouchability to be crafted into narratives that sought to recover their pasts (Rawat & Satyanarayana, 2016). Leaders like Ambedkar, Phule and

Periyar were resurrected in this quest for rewriting the history of caste and reimagining the idea of India as a "modern" democracy; dalit literature and life-writing were seen as repositories of "facts" about dalit lives.

For adivasis, on the other hand, though Birsa Munda is more than just a hero for the Mundas, and Sidhu and Kanhu for the Santhals, the search for universally acceptable icons of adivasi protest, in place of local or regional heroes, is still an ongoing political project. Moreover, as Banerjee argues, adivasis are disadvantaged "because they have not been able to claim alternative archives and alternative histories of their own" (Banerjee, 2016, pp. 131–32). Nongbri goes a step further in denying altogether the importance of an archive for the historical referencing of indigenous experiences. To quote her, "It requires no documentary evidence to establish that in so far as their relations to the general population are concerned, the tribal and indigenous peoples share common experience of exploitation, discrimination and powerlessness" (Nongbri, 2006, p. 88).[12] "We are living documents ourselves," writes Hembrom (Hembrom, 2017a).[13] The importance of colonial and postcolonial archival records and the historian's craft is written off in a single stroke. Today, adivasi scholars have begun to increasingly emphasize the importance of an alternate archive—oral narratives—that would help in the rewriting of adivasi histories, overcome the deficiency of the colonial archive, and offer important insights into the lived history of adivasi communities (Bhukya, 2010, pp. 19–20). In the opinion of Hembrom, "memory" would be the "tool" in the path towards "emancipation". " We remember our stories, customs and techniques, lineages, grievances, humiliations, struggles and defeat to embrace who we are, and reconcile with who we have become, and cope with our lifeways" (Hembrom, 2017b). If the "archival turn"—perspectives on the archive as a symbol of knowledge and power, and an awareness of the systems of regulation and coercion that the archive imposes—is a matter for academic discussion today (Davis, 1987; Steedman, 2001 and; Stoler, 2009), her initiative for documentation grew out of a need to "claim Adivasi stake in historical and contemporary social, cultural and literary spaces and as peoples."[14]

But a larger question, with deep academic and political implication, looms large: are non-adivasis entitled to speak on behalf of adivasis, interpret the past and write adivasi histories, and engage with Adivasi Studies? These questions were somewhat played out when the Gandhi Foundation International Peace Award 2011 was announced for the adivasis of India, on behalf of whom Dr Binayak Sen and Bulu Imam were nominated to receive the honour. Adivasi organisations—Jharkhand Indigenous People's Forum and Jharkhand Human Rights Movement—protested strongly the absence of names of any recipient from their community even as they welcomed the announcement of the award for adivasis. To quote from the letter submitted to Sir Richard Attenborough, Founder President of the Gandhi Foundation. It is extremely painful to know that the foundation has decided to award a renowned doctor and civil rights activist Binayak Sen and Bulu Imam on behalf of Adivasis of India.

> *It is extremely painful to know that the foundation has decided to award a renowned doctor and civil rights activist Binayak Sen and Bulu Imam on behalf of Adivasis of India.*

Adivasi activist Gladson Dungdung expressed his surprise that the Gandhi Foundation had not found "any extraordinary person in the peace-loving Adivasi community" and had asked non-adivasis to "receive award on behalf of another community" (Dungdung, 2011). While "we have high respect for both the recipients", he wrote, " we would not like them to receive the award on behalf of Adivasis of India".

In this new adivasi initiative of crafting a self-identity, non-adivasi academics and non-academics have sometimes been active participants. Particularly from the time of the Operation Green Hunt,[15] there has been a genre of literature produced not just by those within the academia, but by activists, journalists and other members of civil society who wrote largely investigative, often evocative, accounts of their experiences in the "Red Corridor," jolting many out of their complacency. While such writings focused on the Maoists, these stories brought to the fore narratives about vulnerable adivasi communities, residing in the deep forests of Bastar, caught in the conflict between the state and the rebel guerrillas, awaiting displacement and destruction because others coveted the mineral-rich lands on which they lived (Choudhary, 2012; Navlakha, 2012; Roy, 2016; Satnam, 2010). While these were poignant images of the everyday lives of the marginalised, there was a recurrent stereotype of the adivasi

that was delineated. In this context, I refer to Ganesh Devy's understanding of adivasi culture and identity. "Tribal communities", Devy argues, are marked by the "absence of a caste system or any other form of discrimination." Every member of the community is respected: "widows are not ignored, raped women are not stigmatized and orphans are not left to beg." Tribals, he points out, neither "exploit other people's labour for the sake of their own avarice", nor "do they destroy nature to build monuments to the human ego." This is, then, a perpetuation of yet another typecast drawn from colonial ethnography which starkly distinguished "tribe" from "caste," imputing to the first egalitarian values, community consciousness, and love for nature. As Willem van Schendel writes, those groups which were seen earlier as "the opposite of modern" are now "miraculously … harbingers of an alternate modernity." While they escaped the "opprobrium of being primitive", they nevertheless continued to be "the object of an externally-imposed cultural scheme" in which the "indigenous" - and in this case the adivasi - is "essentialized and set apart as the Other of hegemonic modernity" (Willem van Schendel, 2011, p. 28).

How do we, as academics in university spaces—to which many of whom I have quoted also belong—respond to the different ways in which narratives are crafted, the past explored and explained? Here we have two kinds of historical imperatives, sometimes mutually exclusive though not always so. One is based on unpacking colonial discourse and recovering adivasi voices from the colonial archive; the other is more of a communitarian initiative which privileges myths and legends, oral narratives and lived experiences. These are two different ways of knowing and making sense of the past which do not always meet (Dasgupta, 2016a). To draw upon the argument of Cohen, the "reconstructive work of the historian", and in this case the historian who engages in the colonial archive, "is … in constant tension with two other ways of knowing the past - experience and myth - that, in terms of bearing on ordinary lives, are far more pervasive and influential" (Cohen, 1997, p. xii). Adivasi Studies must include the adivasis' own perceptions of the self and the meanings that they may attach to the attributed unity of "adivasihood." It is however also necessary to unpack these narratives, as we do to all narratives, and recognize the politics of representation. The stories of adivasis must be told not always to express difference and dissonance, but also as stories that point to the multiplicity of cultures and myriad ways of thinking. In a sense, it is the relationship between the politics of "being adivasi" and "becoming adivasi" that we need to think about.

4 | TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

Labels are inherently artificial and problematic: they seek to essentialize, delimit, exclude, restrict; they carve out boundaries in areas that are gray. But labels, as a heuristic device, are necessary too, particularly when an embryonic field like Adivasi Studies seeks to establish itself. As a relatively young field that needs to create for itself a space and affirm itself as an "intellectually productive field in the years to come" (Chandra, 2015, p. 127), it would need to delineate today its markers, methods, and agenda, its possibilities for dialogue with other fields like Dalit Studies.

Yet, carving the new domain of Adivasi Studies brings with it its own set of problems. The most difficult question that it needs to address—and which it does—is how far possible it is to carve out a discipline solely in the name of the adivasi, a term which needs continual unpacking. Today, it is necessary to move beyond just discussions of terminology since academics engaging with Adivasi Studies endorse the term adivasi, with all its complexities, as a compromise between contending categories. After all, disciplines, old and new, are self-reflexive and recognize the limits of disciplinary boundaries and disciplinary protocols. Hence, the recent turn to interdisciplinarity, however incomplete has been its journey. In the case of Adivasi Studies, and in the making of the adivasi as a subject, interdisciplinarity is unavoidable even as it presents its own challenges.[16] What makes Adivasi Studies both exciting and challenging, I argue, is its ability to constantly re-think its domain, incorporate newer themes of research within its ambit, broaden its agenda in order to include more scholars within its fold, recognize the limits of its enquiry, and yet creatively think of ways to respond to the challenges that emerge.

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ENDNOTES

[1] "Amendment in CNT/SPT is a death order of already Marginalised in Jharkhand," Statement issued by CNT/SPT Act Bachao Andolan, New Delhi Chapter. http://www.adivasiresurgence.com/protest-demonstration-december-10-recent-amendments-cntspt-act/

[2] "Jharkhand opposition to raise land acts, police firings in assembly," *Business Standard*, Ranchi, November 16, 2016. https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/jharkhand-opposition-to-raise-land-acts-police-firings-in-assembly-116111600963_1.html

[3] The Jharkhand state was created in 2000 after the oldest of the autonomy movements in India (Munda & Bosu Mullick, 2003, p. ii).

[4] The Sarna Dharam is a religious practice amongst adivasis of Jharkhand who proclaim themselves as worshippers of nature. Followers of Sarna celebrate, for example, the Sarhul festival which is celebrated soon after the new leaves grow before the beginning of summer.

[5] In states under the Fifth Schedule (Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Orissa, and Rajasthan), the Governor protects the rights of the adivasis, especially their land rights, and intervenes in the development of the Scheduled Areas. In states under Sixth Schedule (Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, and Mizoram), District Councils and Autonomous Regional Councils have the legislative and executive powers on land transfer and use, forest use, water resources, local customs, and culture. Certain judicial powers are also given to these bodies. For tracing the background of scheduling, see Tewari, 2014.

[6] These adivasis, referred to as "tea tribes," have been agitating for Scheduled Tribe status. In 2016, they met the Home Minister, Rajnath Singh, in order to place their demands. See "Assam's tea tribes: The group that could swing the election is too disaffected to care," *Scroll.in*, April 3, 2016. https://scroll.in/article/806082/assams-tea-tribes-the-group-that-could-swing-the-election-is-too-disaffected-to-care See also, "Panel set up for SC status to 6 OBC communities in Assam," *The Hindu*, New Delhi, March 1, 2016. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/panel-set-up-for-st-status-to-6-obc-communities-in-assam/article8297458.ece

[7] The Indian Council of Indigenous Tribal Peoples, constituted primarily by adivasis from Jharkhand (then Bihar), submitted to the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations in August 1987 the following statement: "From historical, anthropological and sociological points of view, we know that we are the IP of India from prehistoric times with distinct social, economic, political and territorial identities. The Aryan invaders, the Moslem dynasties, and finally the British had established their colonies in India. But as adivasis (original settlers), ie, IP, we still maintain our distinct identities."

[8] Such courses are taught, for example, at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and the Department of History, Ashoka University, and at the Centre for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, Pondicherry University.

[9] The Hindu Right uses the term "vanvasi" or "people of the forest" in place of adivasi. The forest habitat is emphasized here rather than the claims of adivasis to indigeneity as original inhabitants of the land. Through the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram, which is the RSS front specifically for vanvasis, the Hindu nationalists seek to expand the social basis of Hindu nationalist politics, a phenomenon that has become particularly marked since the 1980s. Adivasis are being assimilated into Hinduttva politics and increasingly participating in the Bajrang Dal, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram. (See Sundar, 2016, p. 241.)

[10] Here, Sarkar revisits her earlier discussion of Jitu Santal's movement that appeared as a part of the original Subaltern Studies project (Sarkar, 1985).

[11] Ivy Imogene Hansdak, belonging to the Santhal community, is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of English, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

[12] Tilput Nongbri, belonging to the Khasi community, has retired as a professor in the Centre for the Study of Social Systems at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She was founding director of the North East Studies Programme at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

[13] Chakrabarty argues that "indigenous" is being converted into a powerful rhetorical word, shorn of precise reference but powerful for the same reason. This rhetorical use-value increases in proportion to the decrease in their referential content at the same as they become global (See Chakrabarty, 2005).

[14] https://asiafoundation.org/people/ruby-hembrom

[15] "Operation Green Hunt," which began in 2009, was the name given to an "all-out offensive" by the Government of India's paramilitary forces along with state forces along the borders of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra, against the Naxalites, or those who belonged to the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist). While the government of India does not use the term "Operation Green Hunt" to describe its anti-Naxalite offensive, this term was coined by the media who described these anti-Naxalite operations.

[16] To quote Chandra, if this emerging new field is interdisciplinary, it is by force of circumstance rather than design. Historians are now entering territory that was once the sole preserve of sociologists and anthropologists, who, in turn, are compelled now to rethink their data and fieldwork in order to understand the relationship between the ethnographic present and the myriad pasts of their research subjects (Chandra, 2015, pp. 122–27).

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