

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PROJECTION OF  
HISTORICAL NARRATIVES OF THE INDIAN TRIBAL  
PEOPLE IN “OUR PAST III”

by

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A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of  
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal  
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## ABSTRACT

A critical Analysis of The Projection of Historical Narratives of The Indian Tribal People in “Our Past III”

by

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### **Abstract**

A critical analysis of the historical narratives of the Indian tribal people in the Indian history textbook, Our Past III part I, that has been published by the National council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is used across every central school in India, reveals an overwhelming presence of dominant ideology. It has been played a pivotal role of the selection and representation of the tribal narratives in the textbook. These ideological features include but not limited to the following: tribal peoples are essentialized and presented as homogenous; their religious faiths are not held with the same regard as Hinduism; tribal people’s knowledge and languages are devalued; and finally, tribal peoples’ alternative notions of childhood, including child labor are dismissed. The subsistence living which is key to Indian tribal life is presented as less worthy than the skilled labor jobs and professional careers held by the majority of Indians. This research will argue that the textbook promotes epistemic injustice by neglecting to include tribal people to narrate their history and include their own experiences and knowledge into the textbook.

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## Introduction

The history textbook for class eight, Our Past -III part I, which is published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is used across every central school in India. At the very beginning of the book, it expresses its intention to incorporate theories that are intended to free the history lesson from learning only dates and special events of historical victory. Instead, students are encouraged to critically pursue their journey of learning various historical events of India by not only asking critical questions but also, they are invited to see the history from the common people's perspectives<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, it gives a large emphasis on examining visuals and tries to identify the biases that the pictures might depict<sup>2</sup>. Considering that, it makes the images attached to the textbook equally important as the words. This thesis critically examines in what ways, if at all, the intentions of the textbook writers have been met. How are the historical narratives and the accompanying images described from the people's perspectives? For this reason, I have selected to examine the historical narratives and images of the Indian tribal<sup>3</sup> peoples whose lives and stories are not a part of the mainstream Indian history. The primary purpose of this research is to carefully explore how the textbook tries to portray the life and the stories of the

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<sup>1</sup> "Living in the world we do not always ask historical questions about what we see around us. We take things for granted, as if what we see has always been in the world we inhabit. But most of us have our moments of wonder, when we are curious, and we ask questions that actually are historical."(NCERT, 2014, p. 1)

<sup>2</sup> There are many activities in the textbook that encouraged readers to critically examine the visuals that have been adhered in the textbook. For example I am mentioning an activity that says: "Look carefully at Fig.1 and write a paragraph explaining how this image projects an imperial perception."(NCERT, 2014, p. 1)

<sup>3</sup> It is important to know the difference between the tribal and the indigenous people. The term "indigenous" has a Latin root that suggest the natives and thus indigenous refers to the peoples who used to live in a land before colonization. However, tribal people are those who are self-sufficient, depend on their land for living, not integrated to a national society and not always are native to the land they are living now. Moreover, tribal people have special status in international law as they face problems in addition to those that the wider category of indigenous people face.(International Labour Organization, 2016)

peoples who are situated at the periphery of the Indian society.

While the first chapter of the history textbook expresses the intention to look at history through the lens of everyday life experiences, a careful examination will elucidate that the book itself fails to put those theories into practice because the writers themselves are highly influenced by the colonial mentality<sup>4</sup> and thus ended up giving priority to western philosophy like Platonism. This colonial influence hinders readers from gaining a perspective that is beyond the dominant ideology. This ideology is highly influenced by western philosophical views like platonic realism and unable to think historical experiences as subjective. This ideology tends to define knowledge as abstract and objective. Furthermore, in order to make the knowledge objective, it first classifies knowledge by categorizing, naming, or defining them, then separate them to prevent them from forming as coherent political subjects and last but certainly not the least it makes this separated classification seem right and as well as aesthetic. As Nicholas Mirzoeff puts it, this repeated cycle of experience engenders an ‘aesthetic of respect for the status quo, (Mirzoeff, 2011, p. 476)’. This vicious cycle is responsible for developing a sense of properness, righteousness and beauty (Mirzoeff, 2011). Therefore, the dominance of the ideology excludes the lived experiences of the Indian tribal people from the textbook. Their stories are not considered as historical truth and the historical experiences that they have heard from their ancestors, or they have experienced themselves are not included in the textbook. As a result, ideological conflict is prevalent when it

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<sup>4</sup> The term colonial mentality is used to refer the cultural inferiority felt by people of the former colony that is a result of colonization. The term is similar to what Paulo Freire has called as colonized mentality that includes a “passionate attraction towards” the colonizers(Freire & Macedo, 2014, p. 52). It corresponds with the belief that the cultural values of the colonizer are inherently superior to one's own. The term has been used by postcolonial scholars to discuss the transgenerational effects of colonialism present in former colonies following decolonization. It is commonly used as an operational concept for framing ideological domination in historical colonial experiences. Colonial mentality is a popular term that is used broadly by the ethnic research scholars to refer to a form of internalized oppression.(David & Okazaki, 2006).

comes to describing the stories of the oppressed. While the book tries not to present the history from the perspectives of the ruling class and encourages students to look for critical perspectives to find a counter-narrative (NCERT, 2014), the committee in charge of drafting the book does not deem it necessary to have the tribal peoples tell their own historical narrative. This thesis will also assert how the textbook does not provide readers with any tools and/or content necessary to engage them in a counter-narrative or counter visibility when it comes to understanding the tribal history. This research will reveal the disparity between the theory that the book desires to practice and the end product it produces, focusing on the part of the book that describes historical narratives of Indian tribal peoples.

## **A Brief Literature Review**

A plethora of scholarly research has shown that historical narratives in a school textbook are not merely chosen by the availability of the historical stories and knowledge, but a strategic decision to maintain the dominance of the powerful community in a society (Anyon, 1979; Bartulovic, 2006; Foster & Nicholls, 2005; “Taylor & Guyver, 2012—Google Scholar,” n.d.). Therefore, “the inclusion, exclusion and stereotyped portrayal of historical actors” (Bermudez, n.d., p. 5) in the historical stories in a school textbook is not a coincidence but carefully selected to serve particular ruling interests. As Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978) and Bruner (2009) claim that individuals construct their sense of self and reality through ‘narrative thinking,’ using narratives as ‘cultural tools’ that provide systems of representation and meaning-making particular to their socio-historical contexts, telling historical stories of the marginalized community is very crucial. Research done

by Yasmeen Jahan (Jahan, 2016) depicts, that the plight of Indian Muslims (the majority of them live in ghettos, few have government jobs, and there is a wide achievement gap between Hindus and Muslims) stems from a negative image which has been portrayed in Indian history (i.e., “In the time of partition Muslims were seen as the main culprit” (Jahan, 2016, p. 2)). Consequently, texts present young people with a distorted image in the society which makes Muslim or other suffering less empathetic. Additionally, Jahan argued from a sociological vantage point that the relationship of the Muslim community’s popular image as a homogeneous and marginalized section and the current condition of the quality of life is a circular one. Although there are several pieces of research done examining the representation of the historical narrative of the Indian Muslim, the representation of the history of other minority groups, the Indian tribal people has not been critically analyzed. Just like their Muslim counterpart the tribal people of India are often seen as a homogeneous community, and their stories are often distorted in the interest of upholding the status quo. This thesis will take the opportunity to carefully and critically examine the history of the tribal communities that have been described in chapter four of the textbook for class eight. **The research question is How have the historical stories, knowledge and lived experiences of the tribal peoples been told in Our Past III part I?**

## **Description of the Original Research**

The first part of the thesis will contain a deep analysis of the historical stories of the Indian tribal people. As there is no representative of the tribal people in the textbook committee, it is evident

that every single decision of telling the history of the marginalized group of people has been taken by the majority group of Indians whose life experiences and perspectives are very different from the tribal people of India. Therefore, this portion of my research will be devoted to identifying the ideological underpinnings of the textbook's representation of history. "Ideology is defined here as an explanation or interpretation of social reality which, although presented as objective, is demonstrably partial in that it expresses the social priorities of certain political, economic or other groups" (Anyon, 1979, p. 363). These ideological features include the following: tribal peoples are essentialized and presented as homogenous; their religious faiths are not held with the same regard as Hinduism; tribal people's knowledge and languages are devalued; and finally, tribal peoples' alternative notions of childhood, including child labor are dismissed. The subsistence living which is key to Indian tribal life is presented as less worthy than the skilled labor jobs and professional careers held by the majority of Indians. This research will argue that the textbook promotes epistemic injustice by neglecting to include tribal people to narrate their history and include their own experiences into the textbook. This research is also an effort to not limit itself by only examining the verbal part of the history book but also delve into and contemplate the meanings that the visuals depict. In the second part of the research I will compare the meanings attached to the pictures in the context of their original work to the meanings conveyed within the context of the textbook. My question is: how are the images and their changing meanings playing an integral part of the story that the fourth chapter of the book wants to tell its readers.

Last but certainly not the least, in the final part of the research I will use the historical stories that have been described by the tribal people from the book "Walking with the Comrades" (Roy, 2011). This book has documented the historical experiences of a tribal community in India whose life is

still affected by those historical decisions that were made in colonized India. I will choose the stories from the book written by eminent writer and activist Arundhati Roy that overlap with the stories that chapter four of the history textbook describes. The purpose here is to juxtapose the two types of storytelling, one that has been told by the textbook makers and the other that is told by the tribal people themselves. On that note, following the path of standpoint epistemology, this research will argue “that all knowledge is constructed in a specific matrix of physical location, history, culture, and interests and that these matrices change in configuration from one location to another” (Luttrell, 2009, p. 85). Standpoint theory rejects the idea of the existence of a single canon and refuses to prioritize rationality and objectivity. It rather promotes subjectivity and emotions in the arena of epistemology. Standpoint theorists believe that gaining knowledge is “partial, local, and historically specific. In most version of standpoint theory, there are certain social positions from which it is possible to develop better understanding” (Luttrell, 2009, p. 85). This thesis will expound how the exclusion of emotion and an effort to be politically neutral while telling a historical story of the oppressed can totally change the meaning of the same history. While the textbook tries to manage to be objective and consequently be apathetic while telling stories of historical changes, it also manages to eradicate the curiosity and interest to know about the people who were and still continue to be affected by the political decision made by the incumbent rulers. Critical theory provides a framework which is suitable to examine how majority group maintains their dominance over time by using the political/social/cultural advantages available to them in the society (Anyon, 1979; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009). This paper will examine how the dominant class perpetuates the marginalization of the subordinates by presenting historical stories to students from the point of view of the ruling group. I will use critical theory to examine how the traditionally educated group of a society dominate the intellectual/historical discourse and images

and how different groups have been portrayed historically (who had power; how they used it; and who is responsible for conflict or violence, moreover how the knowledge of marginalized groups is seen, etc).

# Chapter I

## Tales of the Tribal People of India in the History Textbook for Class Eight: An Effort of Assimilation

### A Critical Way of Telling the History

“Our Past-III, part I” begins with critically questioning the history that was told in Indian classrooms before writing the book. It explicitly points the finger to British historians for bringing in the western viewpoint of looking at Indian history<sup>5</sup>. The first chapter of the book shows how Indian history became a showcase for the victory of the colonizers and “their activities, policies, achievements” (NCERT, 2014, p. 3)<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, the dates when the rulers won a war or achieved success was given priority in this colonial account of history. In contrast, the textbook suggests seeing the same history from a different angle. It advocates for a change of telling historical tales where history needs to be told not from the dominant’s (i.e., rulers/kings) perspective but rather from the other’s perspectives. As a result, the emphasis has been shifted from remembering dates of the special occasions of the king’s life to the stories of the people whose life has changed over

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<sup>5</sup> “In 1817, James Mill, a Scottish economist and political philosopher, published a massive three-volume work...Mill thought that all Asian societies were at a lower level of civilization than Europe. According to his telling of history, before the British came to India, Hindu and Muslim despots ruled the country. Religious intolerance, caste taboos and superstitious practices dominated social life. British rule, Melt felt, could civilize India. To do this it was necessary to introduce European manners, arts, institutions and laws in India...In this idea of history, British rule represented all the forces of progress and civilization. The period before British rule was one of darkness. Can such a conception be accepted today?” (NCERT, 2014, pp. 3–4)

<sup>6</sup> “While history books narrated the deeds of Governor- Generals, biographies glorified them as persons, and paintings projected them as powerful figures.” (NCERT, 2014, p. 3) This is written just under a picture of Warren Hastings who was the first Governor- General of India in 1773.

time<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, a period in history is more important here than dates. The textbook stresses that formulating historical questions is a better way to learn the history of everyday people's lives. It encourages readers to find the past of their present life by asking critical historical questions. More importantly, the book unequivocally advocates for describing historical narratives and looking at the world from an unconventional vantage point. Here, the writers are eloquent about the fact that the same historical story can change if it is seen from different viewpoints.

The book is very vocal about the possible damage of seeing Indian history through colonial lenses. Consequently, it wants to avoid any chance of seeing the historical events from a western perspective by primarily getting rid of British historian's perspective to tell Indian history. However, it fails to consider and recognize the colonial mentality that Indians themselves may (consciously or unconsciously) have inside them. As Paulo Freire has articulated a strong possibility of having a passionate attraction towards, the culture and the way of thinking of the colonizers is very common for the people of the former colonies (Freire & Macedo, 2014), it is very difficult for Indians, who have been colonized for centuries together to identify whether they are thinking like the colonizers or not. The textbook implies that describing Indian historical events by Indians is the best way to decolonize the historical stories of the country. The simple equation

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<sup>7</sup>“...time does not have to be always precisely dated in terms of a particular year or a month, sometimes it is actually incorrect to fix precise dates to processes that happen over a period of time... Why, then, do we continue to associate history with a string of dates? This association has a reason. There was a time when history was an account of battles and big events. It was about rulers and their policies. Historians wrote about the year a king was crowned, the year he married, the year he had a child, the year he fought a particular war, the year he died and the year the next ruler succeeded to the throne. For events such as these, specific date can be determined, and histories such as these, debates about dates continue to be important...historians now write about a host of other issues and other questions. They look at how people earned their livelihood, what they produced and ate, how cities developed and market came up, how kingdoms were formed and new ideas spread and how culture and society changed.” (NCERT, 2014, p. 2)

here in play is that eliminating colonizer equals to eradicating colonized mentality and on-going relations of power between ruling interests and those who are ruled. However, following the path of Dr. J. Dei, I argue that this notion needs to be revisited and the idea of decolonizing the Indian history textbook needs to be imagined differently so that the unique positionings of different Indian communities including the tribal peoples can be expressed in their own terms. In other words, there is an increasing need for a shift in how notions of Indian tribal people and other Indian communities are taken up so that they are not thought as singular, in the way that those who work from exclusively West European centric or postmodern perspectives do. I argue that in order to truly decolonize tribal history, an intellectual shift in notions of Indian tribal peoples needs to include a variety of their lived experiences (Dei, 2011).

### **The Goal of the Research**

In the first chapter, the authors raise questions on the “objective” nature of historical events and have concluded that historians can have biases. Moreover, historians can present the past in a certain way that helps to glorify or vilify people in the present. Therefore, it is imperative to know what part of the past is stressed upon and what part is ignored. Consequently, it is essential to know who is telling whose story and how those stories are being told. Although it is essential to change the viewpoints and the framework used by the settlers while it comes to telling historical events, it is also very crucial to understand the agenda of the storytellers. As it is prevalent among history textbook writers to carefully choose a series of events to establish the truth they want students to know (Bermudez, 2019, p. 4), this work will attempt to unveil the implicit assumptions and ideologies that underlie the textbook and had a pivotal role of choosing the stories and presenting

them in a certain way in the history textbook for class eight.

Notably, another purpose of this research is to cast light on the juxtaposition between the critical way that the textbook wants to incorporate while telling the history and the way it ends up representing narratives. In tune with that purpose, Chapter One considers the book's approach to criticality – how to ask questions, be curious and seek alternative perspectives. My analysis of the narratives told about the most marginalized Tribal peoples follows. They are the most politically alienated community in the country who are often labeled as “terrorist” and “Maoist” because they do not agree with the Indian government and sell their land in exchange of money, and instead they choose to fight back to protect their forest (Roy).

Indian tribal people either live in the forest or in a portion of a village that is separated from mainstream Indians. Many tribal groups are spread across different parts of the country and speak different languages, celebrate different festivals and have various facial features. They had a different past and have a different present from the majority of Indians. Tribal people are very proud of their culture, lifestyle and their land. Moreover, it is difficult to cover the diversity of the different tribal life located in different parts of the nation in just one chapter. Also, it is not easy to give a holistic picture of their life and touch upon every major aspect of their life. As there is no representation from the tribal community in the textbook development committee, their lives and stories are told by mainstream upper-class Indians. How they see tribal life and how that view is different from the British colonizers looking at Indians in general is part of my interest.

Chapter four of the book “Our Past-III part I” (the history textbook for class eight) claims to

describe the lifestyle of the tribal people of India. However, while describing them, it ignores to shed light on many critical aspects of their life. It does not include the language they speak, the rituals they follow, the stories they tell and how these aspects of their life got affected in the colonial era and changed over time. Also, it does not talk in depth about their culture and religion. It doesn't describe how the existence of Christian missionaries (from the colonial period) & Hindus and Sikhs from the Indian army after independence have affected their lives. Chapter four shortchanges their everyday lives: how they cultivate, how they hunt or how they do their chores? What songs do they sing while fishing? How do they dance? How do they dress? How do they celebrate special occasions? What does their family look like? What do they teach their children? How do they teach their children? Unfortunately, the textbook does not being to provide a wholistic picture of tribal life.

There are at least twenty major tribal groups in India. Each tribal group is different in varied aspects of their life. Because it is not possible to include the historical stories of every tribal group in one chapter, the writers have chosen specific tribal communities who became famous for their protest movements against the occupant British rulers. On the other hand, there are tribal people in Indian society like Sabar who were historically oppressed and the community was listed as "criminal tribe" in British India. However, their stories are not shared which raises questions about why some tribes were selected and not others. I identified a clear pattern when considering closely the selection of the tribal groups whose stories are mentioned in the textbook. It is striking that the stories of tribal communities, all recognized by famous British researchers, find their place within the confines of this single chapter in the history textbook that is dedicated to telling the tribal stories of India. The chapter carefully places the stories of the tribal communities of Baigas, Chait,

Khonds and others who were studied by either British historians or western anthropologists or had a glorified historical past like Mundas who showed their patriotism by engaging in violent activities against the British. On the other hand, Sabars who have been systematically oppressed during the British era but did not engage in violence were neglected and failed to make their way into the textbook. Thus, it can be said that nationalism is an implicit, if not explicit message of the textbook. emotions that has been given priority to when writing the fourth chapter of the history textbook for class eight.

As Haste & Bermudez have explained (2017) and Bermudez has cited in her paper (Bermudez, 2019), paying exclusive attention to the narrative structure of a history textbook can reveal a whole set of hidden agendas. They emphasize the “elements” that are in the foreground of the story by replacing elements that are situated in the background or by eliminating them. They also encourage researchers to delve into the zone of silence and discover the reasons that make amplify some voices but silence or repress/deny other voices. Finding missing stories can be a way to understand the political intentions of historical accounts. The missing aspects of the Tribal people’s lives in the textbook can give us an idea about the facts that may pose a problem for the status quo or may not be considered central to its purpose or important enough to be included within the limited space of the textbook. However, in this paper, I am interested in analyzing the stories that have been told to identify the assumptions and possible intentions behind the textbook editor’s selections. Equally important, this work critically examines the way the stories are told and what types of tales are presented as salient as well as silenced.

## **Analyzing Chapter four**

The chapter starts with the well-known story of Birsa who fought for Munda tribal group against the British in the late nineteenth century. It starts by depicting the charismatic powers that were possessed by larger than life Birsa, who solved all their problems and went on to save the Mundas from the “dikus” (the outsiders) thereby making a martyr out of him. He was so brave that not only the people from the Munda community but people from other tribal communities also started to follow Birsa as their leader. They believed that Birsa would make them free from the oppression of the outsiders including the British rulers. Since the British rulers were a threat for tribal lifestyle, their livelihood, and their religion, this representation of Birsa as a messiah of tribal freedom is a glorified narrative of veiled Indian patriotism.

The chapter promises to explain the problems that the tribal peoples were facing, the people who created the problems and how they created them. Furthermore, it is interested in showing the life of the tribal people before the British came and how their lives changed because of the colonizers. Birsa is a symbol of nationalism who tries to fight against the colonizers and protect his land. By telling his magical story at the beginning of the chapter, the book clearly emphasizes on the brave story of leaders who fought for their land.

After a dramatic beginning with the glorified story of Birsa, this chapter starts describing the custom and rituals of the tribal peoples in a way that leaves readers with the thought that tribal people are Hindus who do not follow the same caste system as the mainstream Hindus but have many things in common.

You have read about tribal societies last year. Most tribes had customs and rituals that were very different from those laid down by Brahmans. These societies also did not have the sharp social divisions that were characteristic of caste societies. All those who belonged to the same tribe thought of themselves as sharing common ties of kinship. However, this did not mean that there were no social and economic differences within tribes.

*Figure 1. Defining the tribes.*

Source: (OUR PASTS - III , Part I, 2017)

Instead of describing the different tribal communities, their languages and their cultures on their own they are rather explained in contrast to Hinduism. As opposed to depicting their societal structure and their practices, it juxtaposes Indian tribal society with caste based Hindu society. This representation of a subordinate society is clearly dominated by an ideology that casts tribal stories as not worthy of sharing on their own merit. Therefore, this ideology leads to symbolic violence by not projecting tribal society and their identity on their own terms. Moreover, the representation of the tribal society and their culture, demands an understanding about the caste based Indian society as it is used as a reference point. Therefore, it can be said that the narratives are told from the vantage point of Hindus or people who are very familiar with Hindu culture. As a matter of fact, this representation is in stark contrast to the claim that the book has made in very beginning, which is to describe the history from the people's perspectives, not from the

perspectives of the ruling class.

Here the chapter does not clarify who the tribal people are and why we call them tribal. Moreover, what does the term 'tribal' mean? In this regard, it is noteworthy to mention that on the very first page of chapter four it is written that students have already learned about the tribal people and their culture, their rituals in class seven. A closer look at the history book for class seven clearly shows there is nebulous and inadequate information about the identities of the tribal people and their cultures. For example, Chapter seven of the history book for class seven defines the tribal people and says-

*“Many societies in the subcontinent did not follow the social rules and rituals prescribed by the Brahmanas. Nor were they divided into numerous unequal classes. Such societies are often called tribes.”* (Our Past -II, p. 91)

This definition not only oversimplifies the identities of the tribal people of India but also include them in Hinduism by saying that they do not obey the rules created by the Brahmanas (the highest caste in Hinduism), when the fact is that tribal people are not Hindu (Blackburn, 2012, p. 44). They might have similar rituals as Hindus in some part of the country (as all Hindus do not follow the same rituals and do not worship the same gods/goddess unlike Muslims and Christians). Therefore, the book is an extension of the narrative that is much publicized by Hindu Indian army and the religious workers who are trying to claim the tribal people are also Hindus by making use of some similarities that exists between the rituals of tribals and those of Hindus (Blackburn, 2012). The term 'tribal' has a deep political and colonial root. It describes people who live in forests, staying

separated from others and is synonymous to disenfranchised people who are isolated from the mainstream and have no rights to express their opinion (Blackburn, 2012). On the other hand, the definition of the tribal in the textbook for class seven tries to assimilate the tribal people in the main cultural stream by eradicating their own distinct identity.

The chapter attempts to give readers an idea of the different activities that are taken by various tribal groups in India to sustain their livelihood. It has divided them primarily into four groups based on their profession. First, it talks about “Jhum Cultivators” (shifting cultivators) who would clear a small portion of the forest with an axe and then prepared the soil for sowing seeds and finally after harvesting their crops moved to repeat the process somewhere else. Therefore, being able to move freely in the forest is indispensable for them to survive. This type of tribal groups lives in the central and north-eastern part of the country. Second, it delineates how Khonds (a tribal group of Orissa) and other tribal people like them depended on hunting. So, they go out together to find their food including meat, edible wild roots, fruits and other natural resources that they could use for living. They not only use the hidden resources of the forest to fill their empty stomachs, but they are also aware of some useful herbs that had medicinal benefits. The tribal groups who fall under the hunting category collect grains either in exchange of their forest products or labor or a little amount of currency (if they have any). Third, there are several groups of tribal people like Van Gujjars of the Punjab hills, Labadis of Andhra Pradesh, Gaddis of Kulu, Bakarwals of Kashmir who rear domestic animals as their primary source of their earning. Finally, there are some tribal people who stay in a particular place and use their land for farming. For example, Mundas are one of those tribal groups who live in Chottanagpur (NCERT, 2014).

However, this typology of tribal societies is not so clear cut in actuality, tribal societies are being described in narrowly economic terms. The chapter fails to identify that full scope and realities of tribal lives and instead chooses to describe them in a colonial and even contemporary class-based terms. Consequently, it describes the tribal peoples along the lines of middle-class Indians who have a single profession and are known by their profession (i.e., doctor, teacher, engineer). In contrast, the fact remains that there are many overlaps in the professions of tribal people, and it may change in different times of a year. For example, the same clan who would cultivate at a particular time of the year would also hunt at a different time of a year. So, it is not possible to draw a clear line and categorize them based on their profession.

On page 42, the textbook offers readers to have an experience of the activities that the Baigas and Khonds, two types of tribal groups of central India, do for a living. Although it might seem that now the book is trying to delve into the cultural aspect of the tribal peoples and will project their lifestyles from their perspective, it is quite the opposite. This part of the chapter clearly has a mainstream upper-middle-class Indian gaze which is greatly influenced by their “colonized mentality.” They put themselves at the center of everything to try to see and explain the world in a manner that reconciles with their experiences.

This part of the textbook talks about the division of labor in the tribal communities (i.e., Chaitis, Baiga, Khonds). There is a clear effort to describe the place of tribal women in their communities in a way that is similar to their middle-class counterparts. Here the book gives various clear indications and compels readers to see the difference of labor in tribal life where men are considered stronger and expected to do works that need more physical strength. In contrast, women

are expected to do works that are easy and required less physical energy. The work of Verrier Elwin has been used here as supporting evidence that shows women from three different tribal groups are doing works that require less physical strength than men.

source 1

### A time to hunt, a time to sow, a time to move to a new field

Have you ever noticed that people living in different types of societies do not share the same notion of work and time? The lives of the shifting cultivators and hunters in different regions were regulated by a calendar and division of tasks for men and women.

Verrier Elwin, a British anthropologist who lived among the Baigas and Khonds of central India for many years in the 1930s and 1940s, gives us a picture of what this calendar and division of tasks was like. He writes:

In *Chait* women went to clearings to ... cut stalks that were already reaped; men cut large trees and go for their ritual hunt. The hunt began at full moon from the east. Traps of bamboo were used for hunting. The women gathered fruits like sago, tamarind and mushroom. Baiga women can only gather roots or *kanda* and *mahua* seeds. Of all the *adivasis* in Central India, the Baigas were known as the best hunters ... In *Baisakh* the firing of the forest took place, the women gathered unburnt wood to burn. Men continued to hunt, but nearer their villages. In *Jeth* sowing took place and hunting still went on. From *Asadh* to *Bhadon* the men worked in the fields. In *Kuar* the first fruits of beans were ripened and in *Kartik kutki* became ripe. In *Aghan* every crop was ready and in *Pus* winnowing took place. *Pus* was also the time for dances and marriages. In *Magh* shifts were made to new *bewars* and hunting-gathering was the main subsistence activity.



The cycle described above took place in the first year. In the second year there was more time for hunting as only a few crops had to be sown and harvested. But since there was enough food the men lived in the *bewars*. It was only in the third year that the diet had to be supplemented with the forest products.

Adapted from Verrier Elwin, *Baiga* (1939) and Elwin's unpublished 'Notes on the Khonds' (Verrier Elwin Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library)

Figure 2. "Division of tasks".

Source: (NCERT, 2014, p. 42)

More interestingly, the chapter includes the amalgamation of various work done by the famous British Anthropologist Verrier Elwin. The chapter prefers to put a small segment of his vast published and unpublished work and paraphrase his words. They do not even bother to cite it

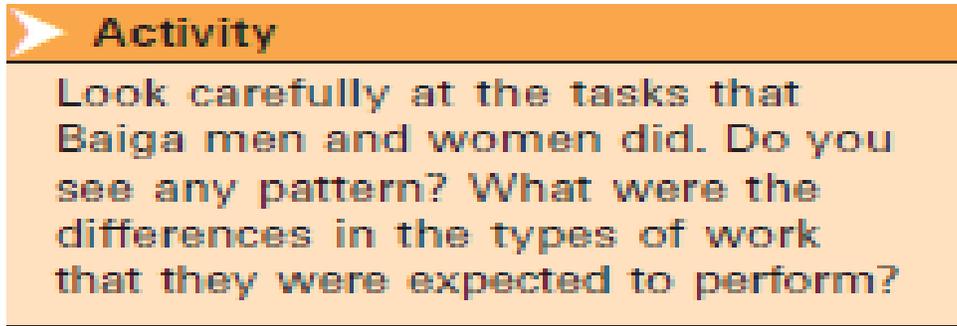
properly so that it would be easier for the readers to verify the original work and see whether those interpretations match or not. Even worse the textbook set a path to view the existence of a division of labor between tribal men and women like other modern societies by explicitly saying it both before and after mentioning the work of Verrier Elwin. Therefore, it is very important to read the original work done by Verrier Elwin to understand the agenda of the textbook writers.

I am examining the chapter II of Verrier Elwin's famous book "The Baiga" (it is cited on page 42 in "our past III part I"). This chapter talks about "Baiga's livelihood." It describes how Baiga men and women work and earn for their family. The word "income" does not only refer to money but also to other forest goods like meat, fruits, etc. Because that is how the Baigas see the term "income" which is very versatile in nature. Here I am using a few lines from the chapter that is very similar to the version that has been used in the history textbook that I have mentioned above. Verrier Elwin mentions that every day is different for Baigas in terms of collecting food or other forest produce. He says that their income is "most haphazard" as it mostly depends on forest and people who collect the forest produce. He brought two extreme periods (a good month and a bad month) of a particular Biaga family (Rawan's household) and left the picture of an average day of their life to readers' imaginations. Here I have chosen the description of a good day of a Baiga family because it includes the contribution of both men and women in collecting goods for their family,

"His unmarried son of seventeen years is with him, and his third wife has not yet run away. He has been successful in killing a guard, a sambhar, two hares and a green pigeon. His women-folk have been industrious in picking mangoes and digging roots." (Elwin, 2007, p. 79)

Here he has simply depicted the works done by both Baiga men and women. He has neither used the term “division of labor” nor tries to level any work as inferior that is delegated to women. In contrast, the usage of the adjective “industrious” prevent readers from thinking of collecting fruits and roots from the forest as an easy task. Additionally, a few pages later the book describes how men and women enjoy fishing and have attached a picture on page 93 where a man and a woman collaboratively catching fish. Consequently, it is clear that the textbook has used the work of a famous anthropologist and added their own view to it to picture the tribal society and their problems similar to the problems of the mainstream Indian society.

Although in chapter one the book clearly criticized the British scholars for belittling Indians by explaining Indian people and their life from a western perspective, chapter four uses the work of British anthropologists as an effort that misrepresents tribal lives. The inclusion of the work of Verrier Elwin unveils a dichotomy between the colonized mentality that the writers possess and the effort of decolonizing the textbook described in chapter one. I will suggest that the writers try to impose upper-middle-class Indian values to tribal life so that their problems look very similar to the majority of Indians. Therefore, another sign of telling the tribal story from the dominant perspective and/or for the upper-middle-class Indian readers is visible.



*Figure 3. "Activity". Source:(NCERT, 2014, p. 42)*

While in the beginning of the book it galvanizes students to ask critical questions, the activity shows the book is anything but allowing students to think outside the box. A careful look at the activity section that has been attached to the same page reveals that students are not asked to think more than something universal about societies (that there are divisions of labor of some sort or another) even when the textbook deals with tribal narratives. However, activities that promote asking various questions and being curious about what Baiga men and women think about how they organize their lives, what is most salient, what brings them meaning could have been more appropriate for helping students to delve into tribal lives more deeply.

After that, the chapter goes on and describes the plight of the tribal people in British India. It says, in colonial India, things got changed for the tribal people who used to enjoy a free life separated from others. This chapter now delineates the changes that altered the power structure by shifting it from the tribal chiefs to the British officials in India. Now, in that changing condition, the tribal people lost their authority that they used to enjoy earlier and were compelled to obey laws made by the British. The British rulers considered the settled cultivators more civilized than the others who used to hunt and move to and from different places for living. To extract maximum revenue, the British forced tribal people to settle down and become farmers because it was easier to control

them when they were in one place. The British introduced forest laws in 1878 and claimed forests as state property. Therefore, people who used to move there freely were not allowed to collect produce, do cultivation inside the forests which made their lives miserable. Eventually, the tribal people became laborers and went away from their home to work in mines or tea gardens. Additionally, they build forest villages and started working in the forest (i.e., cutting timbers, collecting other forest produces) for the British. The problem went further when trades and money lenders saw the opportunity to use the tribals and buy forest produce (i.e., silk cocoons) from them with a minimal amount of money.

Interestingly, the plights of tribal people of India are described in a very superficial way. Problems engendered by the forest law have lightly mentioned, and the tone of telling the story is very monochromatic and plain. People, who used to live a free life and enjoy their own small world, were compelled to live in a particular place, undoubtedly had a hard time adopting to it. People who did not believe in saving money and work only for living their lives were forcefully engaged in work because of the forest law. The chapter does not emphasize the pain they must have felt while they were forced to work as a laborer in a mine or a garden. As the ill effects of the forest law were not limited to putting the free birds inside cages, the danger of seeing from an economic lens only is enormous. Nonetheless, the alteration of tribal life is reduced to an economy that was least important for them. It easily excludes the more significant loss that has its impact both locally and globally. The loss of losing different cultural artifacts, mythology, songs, language, and the violence of raping the mother earth for maximum profit.

Perhaps most egregious, the textbook represents the effects of the forest law as a past phenomenon.

In independent India, there must be no place for the law that has shown its ill effects in the past. However, the same forest law does exist with all its claws intact, and the Indian government still takes advantage of the law in many ways. That means nothing has changed for the tribal people after independence. Unfortunately, the book does not cover that part of the story. Therefore, it is clear that the textbook misinforms readers of the current exploitation of the tribal people using the same law. Readers are left with the message that the forest law and its ill-effects on tribal life is a past phenomenon that went away with the colonizers.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I will present the same story that has been depicted in the chapter but told by the tribal people of India. I will use the work of a famous writer and activist Arundhati Roy who had spent a few months of her life with tribal activists who were fighting against the adverse effects of the forest law introduced by the British. This effort is to show the difference between the tales that have been told in the textbook and the tales that come from the experiences and activism of Tribal people.

*“The first step towards reimagining a world gone terribly wrong would be to stop the annihilation of those who have a different imagination – an imagination that is outside of capitalism as well as communism. An imagination which has an altogether different understanding of what constitutes happiness and fulfillment.”*

- Arundhati Roy from her book *“Walking with the comrades.”*(Roy, 2011, p. 214)

## Chapter II

### Changing the meaning of the Images in the history textbook: An indication of Internal colonialism

#### Introduction

In India the history textbook for class eight includes a plethora of images, and readers are encouraged to look at them critically. Throughout the book, there is an effort to teach history through the visuals also. Therefore, each picture in the book has been chosen carefully and attached to a particular place on a page to serve a purpose. The fourth chapter of the history textbook that dedicates itself to the history of the tribal people has included pictures taken by famous photographers like Sunil Janah, Tiziana and Gianni Baldizzone. These are globally renowned photographers who are known for their work on tribal peoples across different parts of India.

In this paper, I am going to critically analyze three images that are used in chapter four to describe the tribal peoples of India. To provide a little bit of background on these pictures, they were originally taken by the famed photojournalist and documentarian Sunil Janah. He has published the photos in his book *“The tribals of India”* and has narrated the history behind each of the pictures portrayed in this book. In this article, I will elucidate the difference between the message that the photographer has tried to convey to us through the photos and the message that the very same pictures appear to give in chapter four of the textbook. I will first depict the story that Sunil Janah delineates while introducing the pictures to readers of his original book. Then, I will carefully analyze chapter four of the textbook to see the purpose of attaching these three photographs and how their usage in a different context have changed their meaning. Because as

Tejeda et al. indicated “*meanings are never neutral; they are always situated socially, culturally, and historically, and they operate within the logic of differing ideologies that imply differing sets of social practice*” (Tejeda & Espinoza). Finally, I will examine the ideology of the textbook committee members that have been reflected through the selection of the pictures and attaching them in a particular place that might be responsible for changing its meaning entirely.

### **The most beautiful girl of the village**

I will start my discussion with the picture of a pretty Santal girl who is carrying woods on her head. She is nicely dressed up and puts a beautiful smile on her face. Her hair is nicely done and she has flowers attached to her hair that enhances her beauty. Additionally, she is wearing bangles, nose ring, earrings, and necklaces. Sunil Janah has placed the picture in the first section of his book where he talks about the tribal communities who live in the border area of Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal, the three states of eastern India. He has named the picture as “The most beautiful girl of the village” (Janah, 1993, pp. 18-19) and the picture occupies a whole page in his book. Although he has attached the picture at the beginning of the chapter, he talks about the girl and how her pictures have been taken almost at the end of the chapter. The construction of this portion of the book shows that the girl and her story has a special place in the chapter. The picture of the girl has been carefully laid out at the beginning to captivate the reader’s attention and hopes to take the curious reader on a journey where they would be looking for her story till the end.

“*The Tribals of India*” embodies the personal experiences of Sunil Janah and tries to encapsulate the journey of taking the photos that are a vital part of his book. The first segment of the book, he

describes the tribal people and the reasons for his presence amongst them. In a few paragraphs, he beautifully articulates his experience of staying with the tribal people and how he took the photographs. He talks about *Chotaramu Murmu*, an old but very active and physically strong man of the Santal village who took him to places to take the photos. They visited few places, and during that time, the author experienced a few glances of different aspects of their life. After going through a brief history of the tribal community and their culture, poetry, songs, and dance, Sunil Janah started talking about the “*red mahua wine*” and how the government exploits the love of the tribal people for it. The government forbids the Santals to make red mahua wine and sells them a white adulterated version which can be poisonous. He goes on to say how tribal people are compelled to pay a bribe to police officers to buy the wine they like. Chotaramu was very fond of red mahua wine and thus asked for a helping of wine at every house they went to. After having red mahua wine, they were walking through paddy-fields to capture the harvesting activities. As penned in the book, the old man noticed that the young photographer was more interested in taking pictures of the women, so he suggested the photographer that he must take pictures of the most beautiful girl in the village. Sunil Janah noticed that none of the girls in the group that he was shooting at the moment showed resentment on hearing this. They instead agreed with the old man that she was the most beautiful girl in the village. Somewhat to his surprise, Sunil Janah found that the girls rather encouraged him to go with the old man and click her pictures before the sun went down. The old man said:

*“If you want to photograph our prettiest girl, don’t waste too much of your time here. She is in the forest cutting wood. You will make me a sad man if you go away without taking photograph of her...The following morning, I found that Chotaramu had detained her and her equally lovely*

*sister, a child in her early teens, to be photographed again, lest their beauty which he took such a grandfatherly pride in, went unrevealed to the world” (Janah, 1993, p. 26)*

Therefore, the picture not only describes the beauty of the girl herself, but it also shows the beauty of the relationship that the Santal peoples have with each other. It shows the generosity of the Santal women who not only firmly agreed with the old man’s claim but also went ahead and motivated the young photographer to take her picture. The pride of the old man who recommended her name and brought her and her sister the next morning for more photograph indicated a beautiful bonding between the houses in the Santal community. Therefore, the picture is not limited to the beauty of the girl but also tells a charming story of the honesty among tribal men and women that made the piece of art possible. In other words, the beauty of the girl is a reflection of sheer love and care that her community shows for her. Consequently, it seems the shared cultural belief with the Santal community is that a person who is a part of a society that is rooted firmly in mutual relation, cannot be seen as just an individual but as a reflection of the community. By contrast, the western ideology values individual traits (including beauty) over group affiliation and membership; such a perspective distorts the meaning that beauty holds among the Santal Community.

In the context of the textbook, this same picture is used to discuss the division of labor in a tribal community. In this chapter, the book is describing Baiga men and women who live in the central part of the country, but it attaches a picture of the Santal girl whose life is very different from the former community (Janah, 1993). For example, apart from their culture, their skill sets are also different. While the former is a great hunter, the latter tribal community stay at one place and

cultivate. Thus, it is evident that the chapter does not consider the differences amongst the tribal peoples in India and tries to bring them under one umbrella term.

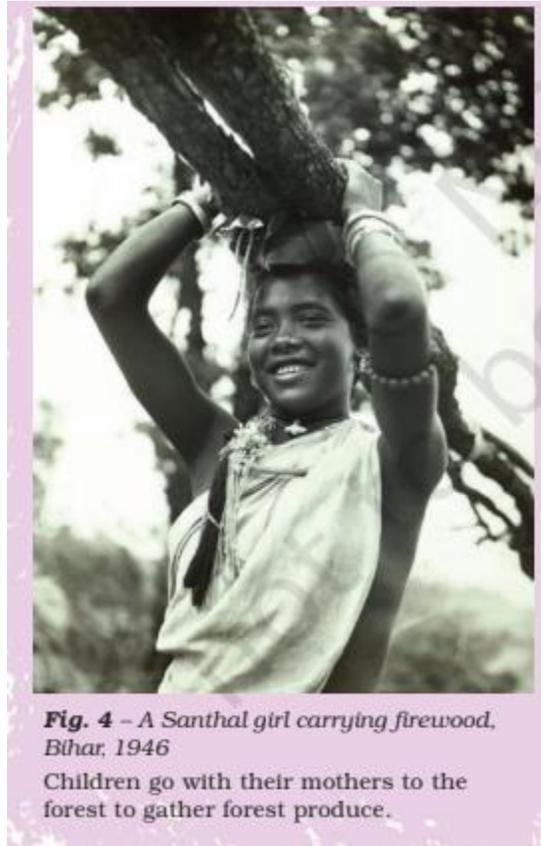


Figure 4. "Girl carrying firewood".

source:(NCERT, 2017, p. 42)

The sentence is written just under the picture, saying "*Children go with their mothers to the forest to gather forest produce*" supports the fact that chapter four of the history textbook uses this picture to show that it is prevalent for tribal children to go with their mother and help them to collect woods. As the textbook does not describe the nature of tribal societies and culture and the differences between them and the mainstream Indian culture, this picture might blur the line

between tribal children and child labor in India. This picture, with the caption attached to it, implies that the girl is delighted to collect woods with her mother in a forest (and not as posing for a photographer who has been told that she is the most beautiful girl in the village). Using the picture out of its context gives a different meaning that implies every child in India who works or compelled to work with their parents is as happy as the girl in the picture.

Also, it was the day of the festival, and that is why the girl is nicely dressed up. She is probably helping her family to collect forest produces for the festival. Moreover, she is posing for a picture, and thus, she puts a beautiful smile on her face. It is not that she was smiling while she was cutting trees and collecting woods in the forest. Importantly, there is a difference between tribal children working with their family and other poor children who work as laborers for less than subsistence wages. Santals, like many tribal peoples, do their work for themselves, and they produce products together for their use. They make everything they might need for living. Therefore, all of them are equipped with many different skills, unlike the modern market global economy where everyone has a particular skill and exchange their skills with money to buy other stuff that they need for living.

If somebody has an expertise in something, then he or she will invest their skill and time for everyone in the village one by one. For example, the chapter talks about an artist who gets a few days off from his regular community work, to show his talent by drawing pictures on the walls of all the huts of the village one after another. He is rewarded not by money but by food and drinks. Santal peoples “*will appreciate the work of art and reminisce, ‘our Munshi Tudu did that! What greater reward is there for an artist !’*” (Janah, 1994, p. 13). Therefore, the works that Santal men,

women, or children do are very different from the work of a laborer or a factory worker or any other menial work done by a person in an individualistic, capitalist society. So, the work done by the Tribal people for their community or themselves cannot be equated with the work done by the wage earners. While in the community, people produce goods for their use, the wage earners produce extra profits for the company. Therefore, while the former has the right to the goods they have produced together, the latter cannot claim the additional products they have made outside the money that they are given. It is important to note here that the tribal peoples of India are living a life akin to the communist ideology way before the idea of communism emerged in Europe (Roy, 2011). This paper is not trying to advocate for the communist ideology inspired way of life but rather attempts to describe a way of life that was common in ancient history all over the world. The modern world failed to spread its tentacles amongst the tribal people because they lived in somewhat geographical isolation in the interior part of a forest but still enjoyed a happier life (Janah, 1994). Hence, their way of life cannot be compared with the mainstream Indians who are strongly influenced by the western way of living.

Additionally, the construction of childhood and what the ideal child should be doing might not be the same for Santal peoples as the western society that the privileged Indians follow. Children in many tribal communities are expected to work with the adults and they have many roles and responsibilities to their family and their community that is very different from the childrearing and schooling processes followed by privileged Indian families. Tribal children are encouraged to learn by acquiring experiences while helping their parents and participating in various activities within the tribal community. So, the girls who were helping their community by collecting wood may not be considered as work, but as a process of learning in her society. My point is that the usage of the

picture out of context reflects an ideology of the writers that is highly influenced by the western ideology that impedes their understanding of cultural differences. A reflection of internal colonialism is vivid in the ideology of the book writers who are unable to differentiate the culture and way of living of the tribal peoples from the mainstream Indians. By mentioning internal colonialism, I am referring the definition given by Barrera, and cited in Tejeda et al. where internal colonialism is stated as a form of colonialism that omits the geographical separation between the dominant and the subordinate population as they are “intermingled” with each other. Here, in this case, the highly educated Indians and their ideology intertwine with the British colonizers when it comes to thinking and looking at subordinate cultures and ends up generalizing them with the majority of the population.

### **Gabada Women at a Loom Weaving Their Striped ‘kerang’**

The fourth chapter of the history textbook has included two pictures taken by Sunil Janah on the same page. Following the impact of the forest law introduced by the British that established government’s right on forest and forest products, this page describes the problems that the tribal people faced while trading forest goods in the nineteenth century. In this section of the chapter, the writers are more interested in putting their fingers on the issue of the enormous amount of wealth that the tribal peoples had, became a reason for their plight. The greed of the outsiders (dikus) creates many problems for the tribals who have never thought of reaping the nature off for their profit. It starts with the problems that many tribal people experienced while the traders and money lenders came to them seeking either their labor or the forest products that they gathered.

The first image shows women weaving cloths using forest products, and the second picture depicts that a tribal woman is working in a mat factory. Although the page begins with narrating the problems that the new form of the market economy created for many tribal peoples around the country, later on, it chooses to talk about a particular tribe, the Santals who lived in Hazaribagh and reared cocoons. It describes how the growing demand of Indian silk in European market acted as an impetus for a large number of business owners to look for the “silk growers.” After recognizing the opportunity of making a considerable profit, the traders started sending their agents to the Santals for the silk, and they encouraged the Santal peoples to collect more cocoons by lending them money. Eventually, the Santals found that the traders were exploiting them by paying a minimal amount of money for the silk, which was at least five times less than what it was worth. They did not take much time to realize that traders were making a massive profit by cutting their wages or by not paying enough money for the cocoons. The chapter concludes by describing the problems related to trade by highlighting that many tribal people considered market and traders as their foe. A careful analysis will make it clear that the tension that brewed between tribal people and the traders is a result of thrusting capitalist economy upon the tribal people. Indubitably, a contrast between the ideology of a communal economy that the tribal peoples followed and the market centered ideology of a capitalist economy is visible. Thus, there is growing resentment amongst the tribal peoples for the traders borne out of their increasing demand for maximum profit through exploitation.

The first picture on the page shows that two tribal women are facing each other and weaving cloths. They are having a conversation, and the woman who is facing us is smiling while doing her work. Both of them are wearing jewelry. The usages of the particular picture demands

attention because it is carefully placed with the texts that describe the resistance of the tribal people against colonial oppression. While one side of the page is about rebelling and exploitation, the other side is operating to sanitize the story, to cover over conflict or disagreeableness.



**Fig. 8** – Godara women weaving

Many tribal groups reacted against the colonial forest laws. They disobeyed the new rules, continued with practices that were declared illegal, and at times rose in open rebellion. Such was the revolt of Songram Sangma in 1906 in Assam, and the forest satyagraha of the 1930s in the Central Provinces.

#### **The problem with trade**

During the nineteenth century, tribal groups found that traders and money-lenders were coming into the forests more often, wanting to buy forest produce, offering cash loans, and asking them to work for wages. It took tribal groups some time to understand the consequences of what was happening.

Let us consider the case of the silk growers. In the eighteenth century, Indian silk was in demand in European markets. The fine quality of Indian silk was highly valued and exports from India increased

rapidly. As the market expanded, East India Company officials tried to encourage silk production to meet the growing demand.

*Figure 5. “Women weaving”.*

*source:(NCERT, 2017, p. 46)*

This picture is taken from the second part of the first section of the book “The Tribals of India,” written by Sunil Janah. In this segment of his book, Janah talks about the ‘Gabadas,’ a tribal group who live in Orissa. Janah laments that despite the uniqueness of their culture, very little has been written about them (Janah, 1993). Although it keeps the title used by the photographer for the image, there is a typographical mistake (Gabada is printed as Gadara) that changes the name of

the tribal group. It sheds light on the ignorance that has been shown by the editors of the history textbook who paid no attention to this error, especially because the book has reprinted ten times after its first publication in 2008.

Sunil Janah is known for expressing his political view using the photographic lens. He was the one who brought to light the grim picture of the famine in Bengal that was responsible for the death of three million people. Through his photography, he has always taken a bold political stance and brought forward the plight of the oppressed. During the second world war, the news department was under the British administration, and thus, they were able to suppress that news or facts that were potentially harmful to their image. However, even in such adversarial situation, Sunil Janah took a brave stance and published his photos that were able to successfully portray the oppression of the British ruler in front of the world (Vyawahare, July 11, 2012) (Pandya, July 9, 2012). Similarly, the picture named "*Gabada women at a loom weaving their striped 'kerang.' Orissa*", has a history that talks about the oppression of the forest department on Gabada people and the ruling power's effort to eradicate the unique culture of the Gabadas. 'Kerang' is one of the beautiful elements of Gabadas culture. It is a colorful cloth that they make for themselves. The usages of different vibrant color in the cloth is what makes it so unique and attractive. Unfortunately, Gabadas are not able to make 'kerang' anymore as the forest department does not allow them to collect the herbs which are used for dyeing the cloth. Consequently, 'Kerang' is going to extinct in the near future (Janah, 1993). Moreover, what makes it worse is that 'Kerang' is just one of the elements of tribal culture all over the country, which is facing a hard time and fighting for existence. So, in essence, it is a very political piece of art that showcases the ruthless authority of the forest department. However, in the context of the textbook the picture is reduced to depict a

scene that only portrays the act of weaving and obscures the symbolic representation of the cloth to describe symbolic violence.

In contrast, the chapter in the textbook does not provide any political background of the picture and thus makes the usage of the photo meaningless. The effort of making the textbook politically 'neutral' is visible here that circumvents every opportunity to describe the insidious effects of forest law and market economy on the tribal people. For instance, the picture is not attached to explain the repression of the forest laws that still exist and continue to affect tribal peoples in India. On the contrary, it is used in a part of the textbook that has portrayed the picture in an apolitical way and shows that tribal women are happily chatting and weaving cloth.

### **A Hajang Woman is Weaving a Mat**

There is another picture on the same page named "*A Hajang woman is weaving a mat.*" This image shows a tribal middle age woman tied to her baby with cloth behind her and weaving a mat. The face of the baby is visible on the left side of the woman. Sentences that are written under the title of the picture describe that tribal women were not only expected to do household works, but also had to carry their children to their workplace and take care of them while working in a field or factories. This description makes readers think that the woman is working in a factory that produces mats.

Conversely, according to the photographer, this picture portrays a glance of the communal and market free life of the Hajang, a tribal group of North Bengal. The women here are making mats

for their own use rather than to sell them in a market. The author here clearly says, “*Hajangs, like all primitive, agrarian people, wove their own clothing, grew their own food crops...They had little need for money*” (Janah, 1993, p. 98).



Figure 6. “A Hajang Woman is Weaving a Mat”.

source:(NCERT, 2017, p. 46)

The inclusion of these two pictures in the page that talks about the exploitation of the tribal communities from the traders and money lenders, implies that the pictures are also about the same issue which in reality they are not. In addition to that, like the photo named “*The most beautiful girl of the village,*” these two pictures do not contain anyone from the tribal community that the page is describing. To be more specific, while the page is talking about the Santals, it includes

pictures of two other tribal communities named Gabadas and Hajangs whose lives are different from Santals. Importantly, while the last two pictures were taken in a politically unstable situation, the textbook has used them for a different purpose. The textbook has transformed the brave story of resistance of the tribal people into coping with new problems created by the traders and money lenders. Instead of showing the brave fight that the tribal peoples of India have historically put up against invasion, the chapter chose to state the problems they faced. It seems disinterested and thereby turns a blind eye to the other part of their history that shows how tribal people fought back together in a unique way to protect themselves from oppressors.

## **Conclusion**

While the pictures represent an effort to keep a distance from the market economy by making produces for themselves or collecting goods for their needs, the history textbook, driven by an ideology that is reinforced by both capitalism and colonialism, is more interested in painting a very different image. The images are attached to show tribal women as wage earners who are making products for the market (i.e., for the factory or the traders). However, the critical examination of the inclusion of these three photographs, reveal three typologies of the hidden ideology that imbues the textbook's misrepresentation of Tribal communities: Firstly, there is a vivid effort to bring different tribal communities under one umbrella term that is "tribal." This serves as evidence of a significant influence of internal colonialism on the ideology that worked behind creating the textbook. Secondly, images have been depoliticized, and thus, serve to tell a completely different story. The readers are not supposed to know the political struggle and the acts of resistance towards assimilation that prevent the tribal peoples of India from going extinct. Last but not least, a closer

look at the pictures and their context in the textbook unveil the fact that inclusion of their stories are nothing more than tokenism. There is no effort to bring a more comprehensive and realistic picture of Tribal life to the general public and the reader.

## **Chapter III**

### **Written History vs Oral Narratives of the Indian Tribal people: An Ideological Juxtaposition**

#### **Introduction**

This segment of the thesis is an effort to juxtapose the history that the textbook depicts and the historical narrative that are recounted by the tribal people themselves. I will use the book “Walking with the Comrades” by the famous Indian writer and activist Arundhati Roy (Roy, 2011) as a reference for the oral history of the tribal people (Knods and other tribal communities who live in the Dandakaranya, Chattisgarh, India). I will quote from portions of the book to describe how the tribal people of Orissa experienced the impact of the forest law in colonial India and how the existence of the same law in modern day India is responsible for their plight. For the purpose of brevity, throughout this segment, I will refer the fourth chapter of Our Past II, part one (NCERT, 2014) as textbook and “Walking with the comrades” (Roy, 2011) as book.

While the textbook is based on the written history, the book depicts the lived experiences of the tribal activists in Orissa and sheds light on how they live and what led them to fight against structural oppression. While the textbook does not include any representative tribal member in their committee, the writer of the book had the opportunity to talk with tribe members herself and learned closely about their journey from the historical past to the present day and how their present is related to their past. While the textbook does not include the voices of tribal community members or how they understand their history, Roy, learned directly from Tribal activists how they see their history and its connection to their present-day problems, and, how they are trying to

change their future by acting on their present-day issues. Roy's book elegantly describes the experiences of the Khonds and how their past, present and possibly their future is intertwined and thus is a continuous repetitive process.

## **Forest Law and its Impact**

“Forest Law and their impact” (NCERT, 2014, p. 45) is an important segment of the fourth chapter of the history textbook where readers get to know about the forest law that was introduced by the British government in India. Here the book describes how the forest law was used to establish control of the state power (*British Raj*) over the Indian forests and forest produces by claiming forest as state property. It delineates the intention of the colonial officers to extract maximum profit by establishing their right on the forest produce. The British rulers also employed the law to prohibit people who used to live in the forests to no longer use the forest resources to make a livelihood. Consequently, the tribal peoples who used to live in the forest area for ages were forced to leave their land. This section of the textbook shows how the newly landless peasants are forced to become waged laborers and started working for the people who introduced the forest law. A shift from having ownership of their own labor to exchanging labor for money has been portrayed here clearly. In the latter part of this section the authors have also depicted the enormous plight of the tribal people who had to work for big corporations as miners, tea planters. Additionally, they have gone on to describe how the tribal people became bonded laborers who were not allowed to go home and were paid “miserably low wages” (NCERT, 2014, p. 47).

Although the textbook has done a commendable job in describing the impact of the forest law on

tribal people, the way it has been presented implies that the law was merely a past phenomenon that existed in colonial India and that which had been eradicated after independence. However, the very same law is still a part of the Indian constitution (Haeuber, 1993) and continues to bear grave consequences for tribal life in India (Bose, n.d.; Satpathy, 2015). Crucially, the mammoth Indian corporations, in the name of development under the legislative provisions of the forest law are trying to evacuate the tribal people from their land (Thekaekara, 2019). After so many years of independence very little has changed for the tribal people. However, in the face of such adversity, in tune with the undaunting spirit of their ancestors, they are still putting up a strong resistance towards the aggression of both the Indian government and the big corporations. In recent years tribal peoples in many places of the country have refused to leave their land, their god, their way of living, and be assimilated by the mainstream Indian ideology (Mondal, 2019; Parul Abrol, 2019; Shaji, 2019). The act of their refusal and resistance has been termed as a “Maoist” act by the Indian government (Guha, 2007; Roy, 2011). However, as writer and activist Arundhati Roy puts it, the resistance is a very old trait of the tribal peoples in India, way before the idea of communism and Marxism emerged (Roy, 2011). Unfortunately, the mainstream Indian ideology tries to westernize everything and label the tribal people as Communists. This same ideology renders people unable to think and see historical events and cultural activities, feel emotions or ask political questions that can challenge the status quo.

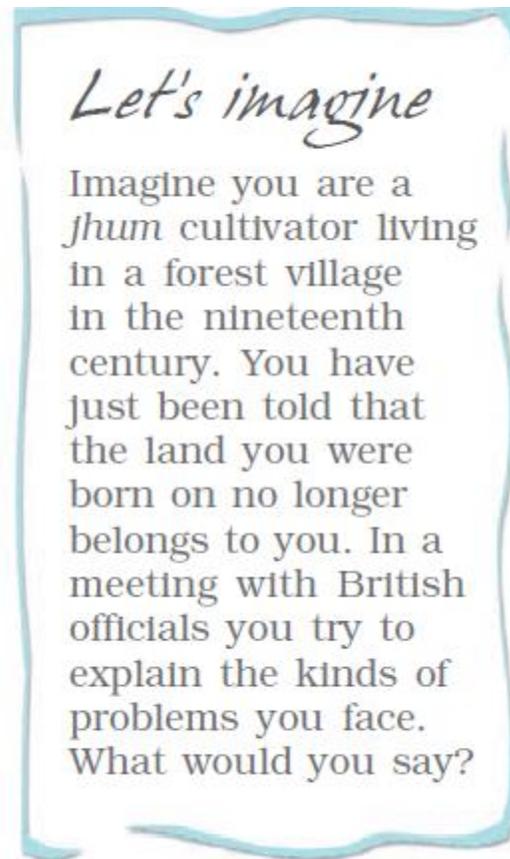
## **Forest Act and the Outsiders**

The textbook talks about the outsiders who started to come into the forests in British India for business during the nineteenth century. It states how the interference of the traders and the money

lenders caused unprecedented problems in tribal life. For instance, the book describes how the traders used to come into the forest and tried to deal with the tribal people to buy forest products. They offered very minimal amount of money for the very profitable forest products that had huge demand in the West. Here, the textbook chooses to talk about silk trading. Indian silk was in very high in demand in Europe; hence, businessmen were interested in buying the best quality silk which led them to come to the Indian tribal peoples in Jharkhand. Santhals were the ones who used to rear cocoons in the forest of Jharkhand. Traders sent their agents to collect the high-quality cocoons from the Santhals in exchange for very small amount of money. The book says,

*“The growers were paid Rs 3 to Rs 4 for a thousand cocoons. These were then exported to Burdwan or Gaya where they were sold at five times the price. The middlemen – so called because they arranged deals between the exporters and silk growers – made huge profit. The silk growers earned very little. Understandably, many tribal groups saw the market and the traders as their main enemies.”(NCERT, 2014, p. 46)*

Here the book has presented the historical narrative in a non-neutral way. Using the word “understandably” shows that the book writers clearly have taken a side here, the side of the oppressed people. However, a sudden end of the narrative leave readers with the assumption that the repression was caused by the colonizers and that it went away with the colonizers. A reflection of this assumption is evident in a part of this chapter in the textbook where readers are encouraged to emotionally connect with the experiences of the tribal peoples who were forced to leave their land:



*Figure 7. "Let's imagine".*

*Source: (NCERT, 2014, p. 50)*

This exercise of "imagination" is unsupported by the textbook and its lack of knowledge, information, experience from the perspective of Tribal people themselves. This task implies that the forceful acquisition of land is a past phenomenon. So, readers have to imagine getting a feeling of how that might feel. Many tribal groups, however, experience a different reality in their daily life. Children who go through the same oppression do not have the privilege to close their eyes and imagine how landlessness feels like. Hence, the exercise of armchair travel in the tribal lives is simply for the privileged who has no connection with the ground reality. Therefore, it can be said that the textbook narrates the history from the vantage point of the privileged. As a matter of fact, asking readers to imagine the pain that a group of historically oppressed people went through is no less

than another form of oppression that symbolic violence. Crucially, the inclusion of this task for students is nothing but an effort to maintain and reproduce the status quo, the existing power structure as it prevents readers from knowing the reality of the landless people. The textbook does not even try to connect the history to the present, the very reality of the daily life of people who still live in the jungles and face the same oppression.

On the other hand, the narrative presented in the book “Walking with the Comrades” shows the continuation of colonial atrocity in independent India. While the textbook finishes its narratives in 1930s, the book starts telling the history of 1980s. India got its independence in 1947 and declared itself as a republic in 1950 (Chandra, 2000). However, surprisingly enough, the stories that the textbook depicts and the oral narratives that the Khonds tell are very similar when it comes to repression. The similarity in the business operating model that tries to extract maximum profit is noticeable in both the narratives that are presented in the textbook and the oral stories that the tribal people tell to the author of the book. This time the reason for oppression is not the expensive silk but very inexpensive tendu leaves which are the main ingredient for making beedis (which are commonly used by lower-class Indians as an alternative for cigarettes and thus have a great demand in market), bamboos for the paper mills and other sessional forest produced. Although the price of the tendu leaves or bamboos is very low, the amount of produce needed for preparing either beedis or papers is huge, and a large amount of money could be earned by cutting the wages of the tribal people who are the provider of the raw materials. The traders realize this opportunity and take maximum advantage of the situation. The traders started from paying as low as 3 paise (100 paise=1 Indian Rupee) for one bundle of tendu leaves that contains roughly fifty leaves, but after several successful strikes, the traders were compelled to pay the tribal people a minimum of

Rs 1 per bundle for their hard work. Now this data will not make sense until an idea of the business and its turnover by only selling tendu leaves per season has been given.

*“Every season the government floats tenders and gives contractors permission to extract a fixed volume of tendu leaves — usually between 1500 and 5000 standard bags known as “manak boras.” Each mana bora contains about 1000 bundles. (Of course, there’s no way of ensuring that the contractors don’t extract more than they are meant to.) By the time the tendu enters the market it is sold in kilos is controlled by the contractors, and leaves plenty of room for manipulation of the worst kind. The most conservative estimate puts their profit per standard bag at about ₹1100. (That’s after paying the party a “levy” of ₹120 per bag.) Even by that gauge, a small contractor (1500 bags) makes about ₹1.6 million a season and a big one (5000 bags) ₹5.5 million. A more realistic estimate would be several times this amount. Meanwhile those who do the actual work make just enough to stay alive until the next season ” (Roy, 2011, p. 71)*

Moreover, the narrator of the story and the representative of the Khond peoples, Comrade Venu, marks the forest department and its officers as their landlord and biggest enemy. She says that the trades come in a season and go back, but the forest department is a perennial problem for them.

*“Every morning forest officials, even the most junior of them, would appear in villages like a bad dream, preventing people from ploughing their fields, grazing their cattle, collecting firewood, plucking leaves, picking fruit — from living. They brought elephants to overrun fields and scattered babool seeds to destroy the soil as they passed by. People would be beaten, arrested, humiliated, their crops destroyed. Of course, from the forest department’s point of view, these were illegal people engaged in unconstitutional activity, and the department was only*

*implementing the Rule of Law. (Their sexual exploitation of women was just an added perk in a hardship posting.)” (Roy, 2011, pp. 73–74)*

It is evident that the picture of life in colonial India (from 1878 to 1930s the time period the textbook describes) and in Independent India (1980s the time that Comrade Venu talks about) were quite similar for the tribal people in Dandakaranya, the land of the Khond peoples.

### **The Difference of Presentation of the Revolts**

After describing the newly introduced forest law by the colonizers and how it affected the tribal lives in India, the textbook very briefly mentions how the tribal people collectively fought against the British Government. In this portion, a critical examination of the projection of the historical events of resistance and revolt that the tribal people bravely showed against the outsider is an attempt to reveal the ideology of the storytellers. For example, the textbook says,

*“Many tribal groups reacted against the colonial forest laws. They disobeyed the new rules, continued with practices that were declared illegal, and at times rose in open rebellion. Such was the revolt of Songram Sangma in 1906 in Assam, and the forest satyagraha of the 1930s in the Central Provinces.” (NCERT, 2014, p. 46)*

This description is very superficial and does not provide readers with the details of how the rebellions were formed and how the tribal people managed to fight against the British government with their limited resources. Additionally, this description does not have a portion showing the effects of the revolts. Did the tribal people win? Or were they defeated in their stand against the powerful and armed British government?

On the other hand, Comrade Venu eloquently paints how in the 1980s the tribal people collectively and collaboratively stood against the forest department and their officials. How with huge bravery the tribal people were able to confront the forest department and retrieve their own land from the outsiders. She says,

*“It prevented the Forest Department from entering the area. On a few occasions, officials were captured, tied to trees and beaten by villagers. It was cathartic revenge for generations of exploitation. Eventually the Forest Department fled. Between 1986 and 2000, the Party redistributed 300,000 acres (1214 square kilometers) of forest land. Today, Comrade Venu says, there are no landless peasants in Dandakaranya.”* (Roy, 2011, p. 74)

This description of revolt has very meticulously clothed in words the bravery of the tribal people who collaboratively fought against the officials of the Forest Department and forced them to leave. This portion also vividly depicts how the tribal people were not only fighting for themselves but for their ancestors, who were repressed in a similar way. Thus, it gives the readers a sense of continuous injustice that the tribal people were going through generation after generation. If we compare the way that the textbook presents the rebellion organized by the tribal people and the oral history said by Comrade Venu, we can easily find a touch of sentiment present in the latter one that makes the story more alive and let the readers to feel the pain that the tribal peoples felt when the Forest Department were there in their villages and the happiness that they felt after the officials left. More importantly, the readers in the process of going through the text are able to feel every emotion that the narrator wants to share with them.

The story also describes how the victory felt to the people who experienced the brutal exploitation of the Forest Department for ages. She continues,

*“For today’s generation of young people, the Forest Department is a distant memory, the stuff of the stories mothers tell their children, about a mythological past of bondage and humiliation. For the older generation, freedom from the Forest Department meant genuine freedom. They could touch it, taste it. It meant far more than India’s Independence ever did.”*

This explicit projection of their happiness leaves readers with a possibility – a possibility of change from one generation to the next. The readers now can feel how the tribal people fought for themselves and get a chance to learn the historical narratives of the Khonds in the same way that Khond children learn from their parents. It is the authentic and unadulterated way of learning history of the Khonds that the textbook is unable to provide.

### **Tribal people and Hinduism**

The fourth chapter of the history textbook has projected the Indian tribal people as Hindus. As discussed in chapter one of this thesis, Indian tribal peoples are described as Hindus, who follow different religious rituals that have some resemblance to Hinduism. This projection makes it clear that the textbook makers were unable to think beyond the ideology that tries to assimilate different tribal groups into Hinduism. While researchers, including Verrier Elwin whose work has been included in the textbook, who visited the tribal villages says that tribal people have their own distinct religious faith (Elwin, 1955, 2007) and they do not come under any formal religion in India as they do not worship gods but the nature that nurture them (Parul Abrol, 2019), the textbook remains oblivious and reduces them to Hindus. Describing all Indian tribes as Hindus and changing

their identity is nothing but an overt depiction of ignorance about the tribal identity. As a matter of fact, it is another feature of the ideology of the textbook makers that promotes assimilation by disregarding the differences of faith.

The reflection of the same ideology is visible in the act of the Hindu evangelicals who arrived in Dandakaranya in the 1980s and still stay there with their agenda. In “Walking with the Comrades” there is a vivid picture describing how the various religious institution started to open their ashram and schools in the tribal village to promote Hinduism within the Khonds. The book tells the stories of Baba Bihari Das and how he started his aggressive processes to “bring tribals back into the Hindu fold.” (Roy, 2011, p. 69). Additionally, it describes how the campaign was actively involved in “denigrating tribal culture, induce self-hatred, and introduce Hinduism’s great gift — caste” (Roy, 2011, p. 69). This includes changing the names of the tribal villages in their new land records. More importantly, changing the names of the people from their old tribal names to new Hindu names. is indubitably an effort to change their identity. Now, in Dandakaranya, people have two names one “peoples name and government names” (Roy, 2011, p. 69) as they have their Hindu names registered on their voter’s lists. For example, the book says Massa Karma became Mahendra Karma. However, there are people who disagreed with changing their name and joined the Hindu fold, were labeled as “Katwas” (Untouchables), and later became “Maoists.” In other words, in order to live, many Indian tribal people have to carry dual identities at the same time. Being tribal Indians, they have to carry the burden of dual or sometimes multiple consciousnesses as Hindus, tribal people of India, different tribal communities or their position in the community. When the mainstream world and its shared ideology rejects to acknowledge the multiple consciousnesses of the tribal people and project them a part of the mainstream community, they support the same

racist discourse that describes them as a homogenic community.

Therefore, it is evident that the history textbook is not seeing the historical events of the tribal peoples from the point of view of the tribal people who have experienced the historical events by themselves or have heard from those who had the first-hand experience. One main reason for the difference of projection the same history is the ideology that the textbook makers believe in and/or influenced by. It obscures their view and prevents them from listening to other stories. The features of the ideology of the book writers that has been reflected in the projection of the historical narratives of tribal India closely matches with the ideology of the oppressors who used to and continue to create problems for the tribal people in countless ways both in colonial period and in independent India. So, the textbook that has been used in government schools is an extension of the mainstream Indian ideology that denies all the difference of faith and project Indian tribal as Hindus.

### **The Projection of a Tribal Hero**

The fourth chapter begins with the brave and magical narratives of Birsa Munda, a hero of the Mundas and for some other tribal peoples in Chottonagpur, Jharkhand. He is projected as a magical hero, a representative of God who could cure all diseases with his supernatural power. The textbook describes Birsa as a savior who has been appointed by God to rescue other villagers who were tortured by the “dikus,” the outsiders, including the traders, money lenders. While describing the Munda revolt, one of the great tribal rebellion against the British, the traders and Christian missionaries, the primary emphasis in the narrative is on one person, the leader, and it has pictured

the rest of the tribal people as followers. In doing so, it has been implied that the role of the leader was way important than the common tribal people who were involved in the rebellion in countless ways. The readers do not find any story of the men and women who made the great revolt possible. Conversely, the storyteller seems busy with glorifying the character of Birsa and projecting him as larger than life hero.

Birsa Munda and his biography are at the core of the last part of chapter four. This part of the chapter describes how Birsa who was a son of a poor Munda, experienced his surroundings and observed injustice against his family and neighbors. A picture of the unjust society and an increasing need for a revolt against the outsiders who exploited Birsa and tribal people like him in many ways has been eloquently presented in this chapter. In this context, the textbook mentions the religious angle of repression that the tribal people went through. For instance, the story includes the experiences of Birsa in his missionary school where he came to know that it would be possible for Mundas to regain their freedom only if they became good Christians. Moreover, he practiced a few rituals of the Vaishnav religion which comes under the bigger umbrella of Hindu religion. The book describes that although Birsa was a student of a missionary school, he was able to understand the hidden agenda of the Christian Missionaries to convert them into Christianity and thus he was able to realize the threat that the Christian Missionaries possessed for his own culture and faith. It is important to note that although the chapter is vocal about the act of assimilation performed by the Christian missionary, it does not talk anything about the overwhelming influence of the Hinduism onto the tribal beliefs and culture. As a matter of fact, the same ideology comes into play here, which includes tribal people into Hinduism and is reluctant towards acknowledging cultural and religious differences.

This is how the book describes the emergence of Birsa Munda as a Munda leader seeking freedom from the outsiders.

*“Birsa was deeply influenced by many of the ideas he came in touch with in his growing -up years. His movement was aimed at reforming tribal society. He urged the Mundas to give up drinking liquor, clean their village, and stop believing in witchcraft and sorcery. But we must remember that Birsa was turned against missionaries and Hindu landlords. He saw them as outside forces they were running the Munda way of life.”* (NCERT, 2014, p. 48)

This segment of the textbook mentions about the missionaries as a representative of a religion which had its effect on tribal life as it tried to assimilate them into their faith and lifestyle. However, when it comes to Hinduism, the writers chose to talk about the Hindu landlord who was not representative of the religious faith, but rather represented a class. Although the aggression presented here is subtle, but a critical look can reveal the intention of the storyteller to safeguard the religious aggression that was equally (if not more) a threat to tribal faith and culture. Moreover, while describing the factors that were the reasons for the Munda’s plight, the textbook identifies,

*“The land policies of the British were destroying their traditional land system, Hindu landlords and moneylenders were taking over their land, and missionaries were criticising their traditional culture.”* (NCERT, 2014, p. 49)

A critical look at the text reveals that two religious communities have been projected in two different ways as the reasons for suffering of the Mundas. Hindus were projected only as landlords

and moneylenders whose act was limited to the tribal economy. On the other hand, the missionaries were responsible for changing their identity. More importantly, the textbook says that after being introduced to the Vaishnav sect, Birsa started to “*value the importance of purity and piety.*” (NCERT, 2014, p. 48) There is a clear juxtaposition between the projection of activities, the Christian missionaries, and the Hindu evangelists. When the former is more explicit about spiritual conversion and more vocal about the bad habits that they thought the Mundas had and shows an attempt to civilize the Mundas, the latter seems to be a comfort zone for the Mundas and has a great positive influence on them.

On the other hand, in the book, Comrade Venu, is vocal about all the tribal people who were a part of the rebellion they formed against the Forest Department. She says how they collectively and collaboratively challenged their status quo and were able to bring change. She does not mention a single name, a hero who was responsible for motivating people. Conversely, the people themselves organized a rebellion, and how their collective will was instrumental for their movement’s success. Here the people come off as mortals with blood and flesh; they are not any representative of God. Hence, the agentic act of the people is not undermined here. The stress is on changing an adverse time through authoritative action of a culminated crowd, not on an auspicious time when a representative of God appears to unchain his followers. Therefore, success is very real, relatable, and can motivate other people who are going through similar oppression and try to find a way out. They do not have to wait for any magical hero who will come from heaven and save them. This oral story is more grounded and thus inspiring.

This leader centric projection of a rebellion obscures the full understanding of the operation of a

rebellion as it eclipses the contributions and the sacrifices of the subordinates who made the leader charismatic. The nature of leader centered projection of a team activity, according to theories of charismatic leadership, describes leader(s) as a heroic figure, omnipotent who single-handedly decides the fortune of his/their followers (Howell & Shamir, 2005). Similarly, Birsa's story has been exaggerated where a leader is more than a hero, a representative of God. Research has shown the importance of the followers for a successful team as there is a reciprocal relationship between the leaders and the followers. Followers play a crucial role in maintaining the group atmosphere by showing their loyalty, support, and cooperation with the leaders that is a key factor in the success of a group (Fiedler, 1967). Hence, there is no leader without the followers (Hollander, 1993). It is the nameless people who are known as followers that make charismatic leaders (Howell & Shamir, 2005). Therefore, it is very important to understand the contribution of the people other than the leader to get an idea of the whole picture. It is pertinent to note that the stories that have been described by the tribal people in the book are follower centered, not leader centered, which aligns more closely to and reflects tribal ideology and their way of living.

The projection of Birsa as a hero reflects the individual-centric ideology that gives priority to individual rather than a group or structure. The ideology of the textbook writers seems very much entrenched to the western ideology, which prevents them from seeing the sacrifices that had been made by the common tribal people in order to organize the Munda revolt.

### **The Position and the Problems of Tribal Women**

Roy's book, is able to describe the lived experiences of the tribal women. It shares stories told by

the women who have joined the party to fight against the oppression of the government and to protect their land and rights. Comrade Narmada shares a long history of Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangathan (KAMS), which at that time had 90,000 enrolled members and could have been recognized as the largest women's organization in India if they had proper publicity. This organization primarily protests against the structural oppression against the tribal women that have been there for generations. KAMS raises their voice against the tradition of forced marriage and abduction amongst Adivasi people, the ritual of compelling the Adivasi women to live in a small house outside their village or forest, bigamy and domestic violence (Roy, 2011). In its long battle KAMS sometimes experienced victory and was able to bring change into the patriarchal society, but at other times they faced failure.

Comrade Narmada shares a story behind a song. The story was twenty years old, but the problem that the song expresses still exists in many places within a sub tribal community called Maadiya. The song was sung by an old lady to the party members in the '80s when the problem was very prevalent in Maadiya women. The old Maadiya women put all her pain into the song describing how the women in that community were not allowed to cover the upper part of their body after marriage. The song goes like this:

*Jumper polo intor Dada, Dakoniley  
Taane tasom intor Dada, Dakoniley  
Bata papam kittom Dada, Dakoniley  
Duniya kadile maata Dada, Dakoniley*

They say we cannot keep our blouses, Dada, Dakoniley  
They make us take them off, Dada,  
In what way have we sinned Dada,  
The world has changed, has it not Dada,

*Aatum hatteke Dada, Dakoniley*

*Aada nanga dantom Dada, Dakoniley*  
*Id pisval manni Dada, Dakoniley*  
*Mava koyaturku vehat Dada, Dakoniley*

But when we go to market Dada,  
We have to go half naked Dada,  
We don't want this life Dada,  
Tell our ancestors this Dada.  
(Roy, 2011, p. 101)

According to comrade Narmada, that was the time when Adivasi women were sharing their painful stories with the party and were joining the party to eliminate the disrespectful traditions for them and their children as well. They joined the party to change course of the repression that the women in their community has been facing for ages. And this was the very first problem that the party took care of. Consequently in 1986, the Adivasi Mahila Sangathan (AMS) was set up that later became a much bigger women's organization, the KAMS. This organization was able to eliminate many customs that were used against women and oftentimes caused discrimination against women. KAMS for them soon become a place where the tribal women could come not only to escape the suppression of their society but also to change their status quo.

Not all the women who joined KAMS were a victim of the traditional customs that played a pivotal role in suppression of women. There are many young women who were raped, witnessed a rape of their family members, or tortured in different ways by the police or other government officials (Sundar, 2006). The author laments that KAMS could easily become the largest women's organization in India and continue to encourage other Indian women if not labeled as a Maoists group by the government (Roy, 2011). On that same note, it can be said that the history textbook has carefully avoided sharing the brave stories of the women fighters who not only fought for themselves against structural oppression but also stood for protecting the land of their community.

Conversely, the textbook chooses to describe the tribal women as helpless and oppressed human beings who continue to act inside the patriarchal society and obey the division of labor (NCERT, 2014).

In her story, comrade Sumitra includes her two friends and activists, Parvati and Kamla. They used to work together with the KAMS organization to make their shared world a better place by eliminating injustice. She says how Parvati and Kamla, two ordinary village girls became a part of the women's organization that combats against social injustice. They have seen how their houses and village were burnt by the Salwa Judum, a militia that is notorious for conducting one sided violence in the name of combating Maoist insurgency in India (Sundar, 2006; Venkatesan, 2011) , and joined the party to fight against the people who were responsible for them being homeless and landless. When Parvati and Kamla had just completed all the arrangements of the Women's Day celebration on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2010 and were taking rest in a little hut situated outside of the village, the armed police force suddenly came and surrounded the place at night. They started firing. Comrade Kamla fought against the force until death. Comrade Parvati managed to escape the place but was found and killed the very next day. Comrade Sumitra continues describing how the press media described the incident. The newspaper did not mention the unequal fight between the two and many, rather ironically, the deaths of two brave women on the International women's day were not provided a place on the pages of the popular newspaper. She laments saying "this cocktail of malice and ignorance is not unusual " (Roy, 2011, p. 108). Unfortunately, a similar sense of ignorance has been shown by the textbook committee members while describing the historical narratives of the tribal peoples of India. Just like the newspaper reporters, the textbook committee members attempt to tell the stories of the tribal people without having a conversation with them.

This representation of the tribal narratives in the history textbook promotes ignorance of knowing the actual incident that the tribal people themselves have experienced. Explaining a situation from the dominant perspective sustains the gap between the Tribal peoples and the other parts of Indian society. This is all part of the cycle of epistemic injustice<sup>8</sup> and epistemic violence<sup>9</sup>.

It is important to note that by ignoring the oral history of the tribal women (in this case), the textbook has missed the opportunity to show the traditions that many women of some tribal community faced and/or still facing. By knowing the tales of the tribal women, readers could relate with their own lived experiences that they have seen or personally experienced inside and outside of their homes. Additionally, readers do not get the chance to know the fearless authoritative stories of comrade Narmada, Comrade Rinki, Comrade Laxmi, a few of the many women who show their agency to change their shared world. In essence, the textbook has projected the tribal women doing their household work even in a time when their society is going through huge change and resistance to oppression. It chooses to depict those women who stay in their houses and not to show them who, just like their male counterparts, leave their comfort zone to fight against the enemy. More importantly, when the male members of the tribal community only fight against the outsiders, their women counterparts combat the issues that occur inside and outside of the tribal community. Unfortunately, the textbook also suppresses the great act of the tribal women by only highlighting

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<sup>8</sup> In epistemic injustice someone is or a group of people are wronged in their capacity as giver(s) of knowledge(Fricker, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> “Gayatri Spivak uses the term “epistemic violence” in her text, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” as a way of marking the silencing of marginalized groups. For Spivak, “general, nonspecialists,” “the illiterate peasantry,” “the tribals,” and the “lowest strata of the urban subproletariat” (Spivak 1998, 282–83) are populations that are routinely silenced or subjected to epistemic violence. An epistemic side of colonialism is the devastating effect of the “disappearing” of knowledge, where local or provincial knowledge is dismissed due to privileging alternative, often Western, epistemic practices.”(Dotson, 2011)

Birsa as a sole, male hero.

The epistemic violence of the textbook has several layers. First, it shows ignorance towards tribal knowledge and lived experiences. Then it undermines the power of the tribal women by projecting them as a passive agent of the tribal community whose activities are limited to household works even in the toughest time. It not only diminishes but belies the active role of women in a tribal community fighting against repression.

## **Conclusion**

The ideology that has been reflected through the selection and presentation of the historical narratives of the tribal peoples in the history textbook (NCERT, 2014) for class eight, follow a pattern that maintains the dominant discourse. A critical analysis of the fourth chapter of the history textbook reveals some features of the ideology that played a pivotal role in making the textbook as it is. In the final part of the thesis, the features that have been detected through a closer examination of the tribal stories depicted in chapter four of the textbook will be presented. Knowing the ideology and its characteristics will expound the reasons that might be responsible for impeding the bookmakers to apply the theories that they intended to reflect on the presentation of the history in the textbook (NCERT, 2014). These ideological features include the following: tribal peoples are essentialized and presented as homogenous; their religious faiths are held with the same regard as Hinduism; tribal people's knowledge and languages are devalued; and finally, tribal peoples' alternative notions of work and learning, childhood including child labor are dismissed. Additionally, the emphasis of charismatic leadership has been given, thus the

importance of the followers have been undermined; tribal women are portrayed as passive sufferers as their agentic active effort to change the status quo has been excluded from the historical narrative ; the subsistence living which is key to Indian tribal life is presented as less worthy than the skilled labor jobs and professional careers held by the majority of Indians. Finally, the ideology leads to the cycle of epistemic injustice and epistemic violence by advocating the dominant discourse that belies the stories of the oppressed and leads to dehumanization. Although in chapter one, the textbook writers express their intention to depict the history of ordinary people and create a new discourse that will be connected to the seemingly mundane life experiences, they fail to not to be objective, but also to realize their biases and their position in the power structure. Consequently, the lived experiences that the book talks about in the very first chapter of the textbook excludes the disadvantaged ones in Indian society. For example, when the first chapter encourages readers to find the historical roots of their daily life experiences and says,

*“Watching someone sip a cup of tea at a roadside tea stall you may wonder – when did people begin to drink tea or coffee? Looking out of the window of a train you may ask yourself – when were railways built and how did people travel long distances before the age of railways? Reading the newspaper in the morning you may be curious to know how people got to hear about things before newspapers began to be printed.”*(NCERT, 2014, p. 1)

Enjoying a cup of tea, traveling on a train, and reading newspapers every morning is describing the people who have time and money to enjoy their moment with a hot cup of tea, to travel, and to know about the world. It is certainly not describing working-class people who cannot afford these luxuries. The book does not consider the children who do not enjoy a cup of tea but serve a cup of tea to people (As child labor is a big problem in India and there is hardly a roadside tea shop that does not have an child labor, often referred to as “*chotu*”). There are children in rural India who

have never seen a train. Also, there are children in India who cannot ride a train for lack of money. Last but not the least, while the last experience talks about reading newspapers it does not consider the first-generation learners whose parents cannot read and write, and thus they do not have newspapers every morning in their house. Or the busy working-class parents who do not have the time to sit and read newspapers. More importantly, these experiences are not for the people who cannot afford to live a peaceful life because of structural oppression like the Khonds people in Dakhsinayan (Roy, 2011). Unfortunately, this exclusion is not limited to this example but rather it is widely present throughout the chapter that describes one of the oppressed communities in India, the tribal peoples. It is certainly a lost opportunity to project the brave tribal women's power that could act as an impetus for other young people in the country to take a stand against their own adversity. To eradicate epistemic injustice and/or violence, as suggested by Prof. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, listening to people whose thinking is not obscured by the dominant ideology is imperative (Morris, 2010). In other words, describing tribal history from the standpoint of the tribal peoples and including their lived experience is necessarily important to eradicate any epistemic injustice.

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