 Ek duniyā alag sī
Narrative strategies and Adivasi representation
in the short stories of Vinod Kumar

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Abstract

This paper investigates the narrative strategies of representation used by the Indian author Vinod Kumar in his literary writing about the life and spaces of the Adivasi. The focal point of this study consists in the fact that the author is a non-Adivasi, thus placing him and his writing in the center of a very much debated issue of Hindi literature i.e. the polarity between the writing through sympathy (Hindi sahānubhūti) and the writing through personal experience (anubhūti). This study-case looks at how the author, being a dikū, an outsider describes the ‘other’ (i.e. the Adivasi). The results show that the author’s representation of the Adivasi, based on a solid empirical knowledge of his ‘other’, contains some elements of romanticism revealing both his outsideness and a strong empathy for the ‘other’.

Keywords: Adivasi, narrative strategies, representation, romanticism, empathy, the other.
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Notes on transliteration and quotations from Hindi

The transliteration of Hindi words is given in italics and follows the convention of McGregor’s Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary with few exceptions. The short -a of some Sanskrit loanwords, still audible in Hindi, signaled with -ā in McGregor, has been transliterated as -a, thus lāvanya instead of lāvanyā. When short -a is not audible in Hindi, this has been omitted in the transliteration, thus tatsam instead of tatsama. Vocalic r, ṛ in McGregor, has been transliterated with r, thus prakṛti instead of prakṛṭi. Nasalization is indicated with m regardless of whether it replaces candrabindu or anusvār (the latter is transliterated with m in McGregor). When anusvār represents a homorganic nasal consonant preceding an occlusive (e.g. k, c, ṭ, t p) then the correspondent homorganic nasal consonants (i.e. ṇ, ṇ, n, m) will be used instead of m.

Some common names of place, the names of authors and scholars and other words frequently used in English literary criticism regarding Hindi literature are normally spelled without diacritics (unless cases where the context requires transliteration) while less known localities and less frequent words are given in transliteration, thus Adivasi, Dalit and Chotanagpur but dikū, sahānubhūti and Buṭgorā. The word Adivasi has always been used without plural -s except for quotations showing otherwise.

Quotations from Hindi sources are given in English translation with the original in footnote. An exception is made in section 4.4 where the analysis is specifically focused on the original. Quotations from Vinod Kumar’s short story collection (Ādivāsi jīvan-jagat kī bārah kahāniyāṁ, ek nāṭak) have been indicated with only page number in brac
1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Representing the other is problematic as it is an act that passes through the strong filter of the eyes and brain of someone looking from a certain distance and from a certain perspective. The distance and perspective affects the ways in which we see the other, and different distances and perspectives result in different representations.

In South Asia, representation has been subject of strong debates already under colonialism when Indian and particularly Bengali intellectuals argued in favor of alternative history writings from the perspective of the colonized, dismissing what they considered Western distortions (see Gottlob, 2003: 29-30, 142-144). The British representation of India (in this dissertation primarily the space of colonial India, i.e. most of South Asia) in the colonial period was forged by what has come to be commonly known as the orientalist perspective, and by an imperialistic drive which allowed them to consider the colonized subject as inferior, uncivilized and irrational. This in turn gave the British the legitimation to bring civilization to those people they were ruling over. At the same time, the Orient also inspired Western fantasies, evoking romanticized ideas, eventually with erotic undertones, especially regarding the ancient past of India. However, those defined as tribal, indigenous or aborigine were double marginalized: beyond mainstream Indian cultural history, living at the borders of the civilized space, and at the very limits of humanness, thus incarnating the quintessence of otherness and would fall in either the stereotype of the ‘noble savage’ or more often in that of the violent tribesman.

After independence the concept of representation gained another shade when applied at the history of marginalized classes as women, Dalits and later on Adivasi. The ‘Subaltern Studies’ group inaugurated by Ranajit Guha in the 1980s aimed at a writing of history from alternative perspectives which until then had remained largely invisible. Thus, such categories have come to be called ‘subaltern’, a term coined by the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, and specific fields of subaltern histories emerged, which also gave a push to subaltern literatures. This was not accidental but it reflected the emergence of new socio-political identities in first place. Subaltern literatures in South-Asia form the deepest layer of the post-colonial discourse in which the authenticity of representation becomes not only a focal part of the literary discourse but also part of the definition of such literatures. In fact, these emerging literary identities soon claimed self-representation to be the only valid form of representation. However, representation never came exclusively from
within the category as many ‘outsiders’ wrote about Dalits, women and later on Adivasi producing lively discussions. A case in point is the critique on Premchand’s short story *Kafan* moved on by Omprakash Valmiki (see Hunt, 2014: 237) and others who rejected the author’s depiction of the Dalit protagonists as being passive and negative. This was perceived to be offensive and non-authentic at the same time. Authors have been divided between those belonging to the category and those not belonging to the category, those writing based on the idea of collective experience (*anubhūti*) and those writing based on empathy or compassion (*sahānubhūti*).

In the case of the Adivasi the binary between them and the outsiders, which come under the label *dikū* from an Adivasi perspective, according to Hardiman goes back to colonial times when the subjugation by outside power institutions, the impact of the British and a subsequent increased inflow of moneylenders, traders and landlords in Adivasi territories, “generated a spirit of resistance which incorporated a consciousness of ‘the adivasi’ against ‘the outsider’ (1987: 15)”. Then, an Adivasi consciousness or Adivasi-hood contrasting with the *dikū* existed much before the term Adivasi, which is a later construction (see section 2.1).

This binary division appears to be categorical and essentialist in nature, constructing a strong and unbridgeable gap especially in the case of Dalit literary criticism. It must be said that in this regard Adivasi literary criticism appears somewhat better disposed towards a less essentialist interpretation. This is a positive attitude since the idea of authenticity through self-experience is not free from internal problems which are certainly worth discussing (see section 2.3.2).

This study investigates the narrative strategies of representation of the Adivasi by a non-Adivasi author, Vinod Kumar, and tries to place the narrative strategies used by the author in relation to the post-colonial insights on the topic of the representation of the other. Giving that Vinod Kumar is a non-Adivasi, it will be interesting to see the effect of his perspective on the representation of the Adivasi and which narrative strategies arise from it.

1.2 Material and aim of the research

The material analyzed consists in a collection of twelve short stories and one drama *Ādivāsi jīvan-jagat kī bārah kahāniyāṁ, ek nāṭak*¹ by the author Vinod Kumar. The aim of the investigation is to see how the author, as an outsider, relates himself to the Adivasi world. The questions that I intend to investigate and eventually to answer are “Which are the

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¹ Twelve short stories and one drama on the Adivasi life and world.
narrative strategies used by the author to relate himself as a non-Adivasi to the Adivasi? How does he position himself vis-à-vis the otherness of the Adivasi? How is the narration of the Adivasi molded by the binary of otherness and solidarity/empathy? What effect do these narrative strategies have on their representation?” By ‘effect’ I mean whether the representation conveyed by him is realistic or stereotyped and distorted, whether it suggests sympathy or criticism, whether it contains elements of ‘authenticity’ or romanticized interpretations of the other. In addition I am interested in knowing whether and how the author’s outsideness is revealed in the short stories and how his narrative fits into a postcolonial discourse.

The choice of this author was driven by a personal interest in the literary quality that I found in the author. The fact that he is not himself an Adivasi is fundamental. I believe that his writing is a sincere literary effort to deal with, and eventually to transcend the borders of understanding between the Adivasi and the dikū. The conscious reflection of the outsider’s perspective, and the inherent empathetic concern, is the whole point of the author’s concern and my research framework which wants to challenge the binary of anubhūti and sahānubhūti. The selection of the book was random. The only necessary requirement for that was to deal with different aspects of the life and world of the Adivasi i.e. Ādivāsi jīvan-jagat.

1.3 Method
The analysis has been carried on through a close reading of the primary sources i.e. the twelve short stories and the drama. Every short story has been summarized and analyzed in the third chapter. In the fourth chapter the narrative strategies have been outlined and further discussed. They are divided into four major literary elements: the narrator, the characters, the settings and the language. In order to answer to my research questions I first needed to detect the narrative strategies used by the author and secondly to relate them to the kind of representation that they conveyed. As it was impossible to know a priori which would be the strategies used by the author I began the analysis without any expectations, marking the strategies every time that I could identify one. The identification of the narrative strategies was used to reason about the kind of representation expressed in light of the theoretical background on the historical and political representation of Adivasi through time (discussed in section 2.2) and the literary representation (discussed in section 2.3). The results were then summarized in the conclusions.
The reading of the texts was done in the light of a primarily post-colonialist approach. However, other interpretations of the text were at times, not only possible, but even complementary to the post-colonialist reading, as eco-criticism and gender criticism.

2. ISSUES ON ADIVASI REPRESENTATION

2.1 Terminology

There are several terms that have been used to refer to a number of societies living in different parts of the Indian subcontinent among which the most common are: ‘ādivāśī’, ‘mūlvāśī’ ‘vanvāśī’, ‘jātiljanglī jāti’, ‘tribes/tribals’, ‘aborigines’, ‘indigenous’, ‘Backward Hindus’ and in legal terms ‘Schedule Tribes’. To begin with it is necessary to clarify what these terms mean and which are the problematics that follow. Ādivāśī is a Sanskrit compound word formed by ādi meaning ‘beginning’ and vāśī meaning ‘resident, inhabitant’ and therefore it conveys the idea of ‘first/original inhabitant’. This term goes back to the 1930s when Adivasi intellectuals and activists of Chotanagpur coined it on the mythological and somewhat romantic idea that the Adivasi would have been the original inhabitants of the subcontinent. The concept of ‘ādiva’ thus was meant to translate the English ‘aborigine’ which has the same meaning. A semantically similar term, even though less used nowadays, is mūlvāśī³. This idea is however, somehow speculative in regard to ancient times⁴ and easily falsifiable regarding to more recent times that show that many Adivasi groups have a history of immigration⁵. According to Guha the question of the primordial population of the subcontinent is even irrelevant:

[...] no freedom is lost if we accept that rights exist solely in the present: cultural expressions, ethnic or national identities, have rights irrespective of the length of their genealogies… (Guha: 1999, 202-3)

The point expressed by Guha is an important one. Given that we have a certain territory with different societies that have settled there at different times in history, the only possible

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² There is no doubt that the Adivasi of Austro-Asiatic origin occupied large regions of the subcontinent much before the mainstream Hindu society reached off to the remote parts of North and Central India. This however does not prove that they are the original inhabitants.
³ mūl means ‘root, source, origin’.
⁴ According to the latest theories the Indian subcontinent started to be colonized by modern humans from the Middle Paleolithic with an increasing of archeological records found all over the subcontinent from 45,000 years ago while evidence for modern behaviors and symbolism dates back to 28,500 years ago (James and Petraglia, 2005: 12, 13). Given such a time depth speaking of original inhabitant becomes simply meaningless since the migrations to and within the subcontinent are many and difficult to establish.
⁵ Dube pointed out that it is difficult to speak of original inhabitants when tribal traditions themselves mention migrations of the ancestors, as well as there is evidence of groups pushing out each other from the areas first inhabited (1977: 2).
solution for cohabitation, from a judicial perspective, is that based on common human rights rather than on the principle of who arrived first. However, Kela states:

[...] whether adivasi groups were or were not the original inhabitants of the subcontinent, they were certainly the original inhabitants of the regions they occupied in the colonial period (and occupy today) (2006: 511).

Thus, from Kela’s perspective we can still define the Adivasi as the ‘original inhabitants’ but only in relation to a fixed timeframe starting from the 17th century and onwards, and not in a primordial-sense. At the same time we can safely state that the Adivasi were in the subcontinent before the arrival of the Aryans, since these last ones migrated to the subcontinent from the second part of the second millennium BC. Early intermixing between the Aryans and the local population must have occurred which means that even non-Adivasi have some Adivasi blood after all. From a contemporary Hindutva perspective the issue of the Adivasi’s anteriority is sensitive and it has often been rejected. Together with this, references to a different subjectivity of the Adivasi has also been rejected, particularly when it related to the claim that they were outside of the Hindu society. This is why an alternative term, vanvāśī ‘forest dweller’, has been invoked relying on the fact that many of these communities (but far from all!) lived, and in some cases still live, on the margins or even inside the forests. ‘Vanvāśī’ however emphasizes the ‘primitive’ character of the people designed by it that is Hindus who live in the wilderness, wild Hindus.

However, previous to the political discourses of the 1930s and onwards the term used in the major vernaculars of North India was simply jāti (or in older Gujarati texts even jangli jāti (Hardiman, 1987: 13) thus without any particular differentiation from all the other varieties of jāti. When the British came and started to colonize the interior of the subcontinent they referred to some communities with the words ‘tribe’ or ‘tribal’, ‘aborigines’ and ‘indigenous’. Of all the terms these are the least appropriate. As Prathama Banerjee remarks, tribe is a modern construction, and more in specific it is born out of the colonial modernity that saw these people as an “isolated, a-historical and pre-political entity” (2016: 132-33) reflecting the romantic image of the noble savage. Along with this, the categorization of tribes created an inevitable dichotomy between the ‘primitive man’ and the ‘civilized man’ which embodied the Darwinian theory of evolution. Applying the Darwinist approach to human communities the British could justify their involvement in the subcontinent and also the crude subjugation of the Adivasi. Today, not only the (colonial) evolutionary theory applied to human societies is dismissed, but also the assumptions on the Adivasi as being isolated,
ahistorical and pre-political identities. In fact it is demonstrated that the Adivasi in precolonial times have often been involved with outside kingdoms in policies regarding land and forests, payments of tributes, etc., and at times even formed own kingdoms competing, allying and intermixing with others (this will be illustrated more in details in 2.2.2).

As already mentioned that the term ‘aborigine’ was calqued to form the word ‘Adivasi’ meaning ‘original inhabitant’ but it should be added, as Guha observed, that the terms ‘tribe/tribal’ and ‘aborigine’ are sometimes fallaciously used as synonyms even though they have different meanings: tribe is a way to organize a community while aborigine simply means ‘from the beginning’ (1999: 6). The confusion depends on the racial theory according to which the indigenous populations aren’t capable of developing beyond the ‘tribal’ evolutionary stage and therefore tribes would inevitably correspond to aborigines (Guha, 1999: 6). Similarly, ‘indigenous’ refers to people who are born in the place where they live. To summarize this last point it can be said that despite the semantics of the terminology the Adivasi are not comparable with the Aborigine of Australia, particularly since the latter completely lacked state formation (see Edwards, 2007). Rather, if we had to dare any kind of comparison, they resembled more the societies of Mesoamerica revolving around the sphere of the central state of the Maya civilization however, this is not the place for a discussion on such ascriptions. Even if the term tribe has proven to be the least suitable it has not completely disappeared and in fact even in accordance with the Constitution of India many Adivasi communities are registered as Scheduled Tribes (ST). Scheduled Tribes together with Scheduled Castes (SC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) are categories that the state recognizes as having been historically disadvantaged and therefore they are given reservations in government jobs, higher educational institutions and in the political system. Finally, ‘Backward Hindus’ was a term used by the Indian scholar Govind Sadashiv Ghurye (1893-1983) who saw Adivasi as part of mainstream Hindu culture (Das Gupta, 2012a: 4). This term is today out of use.

Having taken all this into consideration it seems that ‘Adivasi’ is the most practical term. In fact this term has become widely used in academic discourses since the awakening of Adivasi identity in the 1980s (Dasgupta, 2016: 2) and it is the term that Adivasi use to describe themselves. However the semantic of the term Adivasi is still quite problematic (see above) and therefore a better definition should be found. Hardiman suggested a quite agreeable interpretation of the term:
The term ‘adivasi’ is preferable in the Indian context because it relates to a particular historical development: that of the subjugation during the nineteenth century of a wide variety of communities which before the colonial period had remained free, or at least relatively free, from the controls of outside states (1987: 15).

This definition has the advantage of relaying on historical experiences which are shared, perhaps at different degrees, by practically all those communities that are now called Adivasi. Hardiman has pointed out the real common denominator of the Adivasi. Moreover, he accurately states: “a wide variety of communities which before colonial period had remained free, or at least relatively free [my italics] from the controls of outside states (1987: 15)”. It is appropriate to say “relatively free” since as mentioned before interactions of different kinds, at times involving also subjugation, between Adivasi communities and different states were taking place even before colonialism (see 2.2.2). Thus defining the Adivasi in this way has the advantage to stress some socio-political developments in relation to a specific timeframe (the British colonization) instead of pointing to cultural features (as modes of agricultural production, use of technology, language and religion, etc.), place of residence, isolation and their relation to history which systematically have proven to not be shared by all communities.

On the other side of the binary there are the non-Adivasi, the outsiders, which the Adivasi call dikū. As Kannabiran suggests the term dikū “indicates both the ethnic and the class dimensions of the exploitation of the tribal peasantry (2012: 245)”. She adds that for Munda, Oraon and Ho people the term means ‘trouble-makers’ (2012: 245). This would be coherent with the explanation of its etymology given by Vinod Kumar (see Appendix 2). According to him the word dikū comes from diq a Hindi word (in fact an Arabic loanword) meaning ‘troubled, irritated’, which together with karnā forms the compound verb diq karnā meaning ‘to irritate, to tease’ (McGregor, 1993: 494). Thus dikū takes the sense of diq karnevālā ‘one who makes trouble’, i.e. a ‘trouble maker’. However, Chatterji believes it might simply mean ‘those’ (plural form of di ‘that’) in some Adivasi languages, used to differentiate all outsiders from ‘us’ i.e. the Adivasi (1989: 147).

2.2 The historical and political representation of the Adivasi

2.2.1 Issues on writing a history of the Adivasi

Prathma Banerjee pointed out a basic and deep going problem that all scholars face when they turn their attention to Adivasi history:
One of the challenges of doing adivasi/tribal studies is that tribes and adivasis are almost always invisible in modern state archives, where they surface only as objects of counter-insurgency and/or policy. Adivasis and tribes also do not figure as subjects of archeology and textual exegesis. While this is true for most subaltern subjects—the fact that it is difficult to write their stories because of their archival, archeological and textual invisibility—adivasis and tribes are doubly disadvantaged because they have not been able to claim alternative archives and alternative histories of their own, unlike some other subaltern subjects such as dalits (2016: 131-132).

The point made here is very radical and seems to not take into consideration the work initiated by Ranjit Guha and other s who followed him in the Subaltern Studies Program. It is unarguable that in the last three or four decades quite many valuable attempts have been made to give visibility to the invisible ones (see Dube, 1977; Guha, 1982, 1983; Guha 1983; Hardiman, 1987). Such attempts have also been challenged, for example by Spivak (1988) in her famous essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ where she concludes that the Subaltern cannot speak, inasmuch it is muted by elite intellectuals who speak for them. Banerjee sustains her claim on Adivasi’s invisibility on the basis of two main reasons: one is language, the other is religion. The languages of the Adivasi hardly developed into written literary vernaculars until recently. Their tradition is almost exclusively oral. Therefore, Adivasi history could never form a distinct entity in either historiography or in the regional politics. The relation between language, scripturalization and the writing of history is particular strong in India, where regional histories came into being due to the fact that administration and politics where shaped mostly in different regional languages. Original Adivasi voices, if they appear at all, are translated voices: transferred from a language to another, from one cultural code to another. They are therefore far away from any original representation. The absence of an Adivasi/tribal historiographical tradition might be ascribed to the absence of an Indian historiography as such, at least before the Sultanate epoch (see Gottlob, 2003: Introduction). However, the idea that ancient India lacked a sense of history and a real historiographical tradition is controversial. In any case it is true that today historians are still quite behind in the writing of Adivasi history. This shall not be perceived as an impossible task but it seems that it will require the adoption of different approaches. For example Banerjee argues that Adivasi studies need to overcome the “divorce of economy, ecology and polity” that has characterized traditional history writing (2016: 144). In other words it will be necessary to combine a range

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6 I use the term ‘historiography’ to refer to the writing of history in contrast to ‘history’ which is merely the sum of the past events. Thus history here has the Hegelian sense of res gestae. I follow Vann’s definition of historiography as being “based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particular details from the authentic materials in those sources, and the synthesis of those details into a narrative that stands the test of critical examination” (Vann, 2018).
of issues coming from different disciplines in order to write Adivasi history. Chatterjee goes so long as to say that such post-colonial neologisms (including the term ‘Adivasi’) which treats them as ontological categories in fact just continues the colonial erosive process of precolonial histories (2016: 9). This argument is discussable and perhaps too radical. She concludes that in order to decolonize history we will need to look beyond such constructions to write a history of those communities that only in modern times have come to form a unitary identity (2016: 34). Facing a scarcity of documentation it might be helpful to look at literary sources as well, an approach that bears its own difficulties, but that definitely has some potential as Milanetti (2012) demonstrates. In fact, the first references to vanvāsī comes from literary sources, the Ramayana in particular. Though it is doubtful whether this was a technical term to refer to a population or to a group of populations.

The second problem in reconstructing the Adivasi identity lifted by Banerjee is that of religion. She observes that the religious practices of the Adivasi never came to form a compact theology and thus were defenseless in front of the attempts of conversion of Hinduism at one side and Christianity at the other (Banerjee, 2016: 150-51). She refers mainly to the 19th and 20th century and does not mention Islam that obviously also had impact on the Adivasi, especially in medieval times. However, she does not specify what exactly she means by ‘a compact theology’ and even then one could argue that the reasons behind the conversion of the Adivasi is part of a power discourse rather than theological debates.

2.2.2 The Adivasi in precolonial times

The origin and the provenience of those hunter-gatherer groups that in the Paleolithic Age left the first traces of microliths on the Indian subcontinent is difficult to establish. However, it seems that the builders of the many megalithic sites in Jharkhand, some dating back at least 3,000 years (possibly 5,000), were Mundaric people (Imam, 2014: 20). Moreover, Imam points to the tradition of megalithic burial grounds, still existing today among the Munda and the Oraon, as an element of continuity with the archeological sites (2014: 26). Then it is certainly the case that the presence of some Adivasi communities, at least in Jharkhand, is uninterrupted since 3,000-5,000 years and predates the Late Vedic colonization.

It is unquestionable that deforestation and the assimilation of local communities in the agrarian system of surplus-based states is a phenomenon that goes back to the Late Vedic colonization of the Gangetic plain and continued at varying speed through the last three millennia. Similarly it is out of question that Adivasi have ever been historically isolated communities. In fact, not only were they in interaction with rulers and kingdoms but at times
they also formed own so called ‘tribal kingdoms’ that fight for their autonomy. Johannes Bronkhorst has highlighted how the Magadha Empire, which was not of Vedic origin, had a great impact on the modeling of the classical Indian culture and religions (2007).

The traditional assumption that the Aryan conquest pushed the tribes deep into the forests as they expanded is nowadays outdated and scholars as Guha suggest 1) that the first millennium saw a process of economic and cultural unification that incorporated people that mastered agricultural, pastoral and foraging strategies and 2) that the agrarian settlements and urbanization of the river valleys triggered a cultural and technological differentiation of the communities occupying the riverine plains, the forest, the savanna, the desert and the mountains which “co-evolved in continuous interaction involving both conflict and cooperation over the next two millennia (1999: 26)”.

However, our knowledge about the ancient relations between the Aryans and the populations that were there before is quite vague. It is proved that the consumption of rice (either wholly wild or partially cultivated) and settlements in the Gangetic valley goes back to the 7th millennium BC while other crops (wheat, barley, lentils) and domesticated sheep, goats and zebu were introduced from West around 2200 BC (Fuller, 2014: 395). Mixed winter and summer cultivation is found from the 2nd millennium onwards, while domesticated rice is attested from 1700 BC and the emergence of sedentism in the middle Ganges is therefore put between 2500-1700 BC (Fuller, 2014: 395, 96). This means that farming was already there when the Indo-Aryans migrants came and settled in the Gangetic plains (2000-1400 BC according to Kulke and Rothermund, 1986: 32) and it makes very plausible to imagine some kind of integration between the local communities and the new intruders. In fact George Erdosy suggested that the term ārya might have been a cultural category belonging to different ethnic groups some of which even indigenous of South Asia (quoted in Bronkhorst, 2007: 266). This implies that the ethnic differentiation must have been a later construction.

According to Kulke and Rothermund, when the subcontinent (except the southernmost part) was unified by Ashoka in the 3rd century BC, the areas effectively defeated and controlled were those at the borders of the empire and not the vast areas covered by thick forest of the interior whose inhabitants are mentioned in some inscriptions as “undefeated (avijita) neighbors and forest tribes (atavi [sic]) inside the empire […] (1986: 65, 66)”.

7 Atavi (aṭavī in transliteration) meaning ‘forest folk’ is yet another, and much older, term that refers to the Adivasi. The term is found on the Rock Edict XIII of Ashoka (Sircar, 1974: 119-20).
between the Indo-Aryan speaking kingdoms and the indigenous tribes can be observed. This phenomenon is the rise and spread of the Rajput culture sometimes called ‘Rajputization’ (Kulke and Rothermund, 1998: 111).

Rajputization is a process that Fattori described as “the inclusive, integrative attitude by tribal groups to enhance their social and political status through the adoption of specific features of Rajput culture” (2012: 133). Thus, Rajput was a title given to, and often claimed by, clans of petty warriors able to establish autonomous regional kingdoms. In this category were incorporated also indigenous tribes, as in the case of the Cheros of Jharkhand and the Gond of central India that, becoming Rajputs, they separated from the rest of the tribesmen (Kela, 2006: 514). The same can be said for the Bhils of Rajasthan (see Fattori, 2012: 133-136). The mechanisms through which a tribal clan would form a kingdom are summarized by Kulke and Rothermund in the following way:

There were usually three stages of this process: initially a tribal chieftain would turn into a local Hindu princeling, then this prince would become a king surrounded by samantas [tributary princes] and thus establish an ‘early kingdom’, and, in the third stage, great rulers of ‘imperial kingdoms’ would emerge who controlled large realms and integrated the samantas into the internal structure of their realm (1986: 123).

These processes of state formation went hand in hand with agrarian expansion and, again according to Kulke and Rothermund, “the displacement of tribal people who were either pushed into barren or mountainous tracts or incorporated into the caste system as Shudras (1986: 123)”. However not all Adivasi were absorbed into the agrarian system and even when they did they could still maintain their identity, at least in some cases. Kela argues that the patterns behind this process were variegated but much depended on at least two major factors i.e. 1) the possibility of full scale agriculture which encouraged peasantization and absorption into castes, and 2) location in forest frontiers, where Adivasi were more likely to maintain their autonomy (2006: 515).

The next phase of increasing contacts between state and tribal population was during the expansion of the Mughal Empire in the 16th and 17th centuries when demographic growth encouraged the cultivation of yet virgin soils covered by forests. In this period a new force came into play i.e. the Islamic religion and with it the conversion of tribal communities most notably the Bhils of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, but also some communities of Avadh and the eastern regions of Bihar and Bengal. At the same time, conversion was ongoing particularly through bhakti movements and saint poets. Through a re-reading of Tulsidas’ Rāmcaritmānas Milanetti suggests exactly this, and he argues that the aim of the poem itself
might have been finalized to the incorporation of tribal population of Avadh and the region around Benares into Hinduism (2012: 42). Milanetti points out something that will become central in the colonial period i.e. the interdependence between the development of peasant agriculture, the establishment of political powers, the diffusion of religion(s) and the conversion of tribes. To use his own words:

[…] within this history of agriculture conquest, what has happened once happened again and, to a certain extent, will continue to happen: the use of religion as an instrument of absorption and control; the creation and the co-optation of a local elite, who is progressively separated from the rest of the indigenous groups, and who is entrusted with the task of mediating and transmitting the values of ‘modernity’; the submission and sometimes the sacrifice of woman; the legitimation of the new and the delegitimization of the old, of the primitive, of the underdeveloped. The civilization of the tribal communities in the name of agricultural development is therefore another chapter in this perennial history of conquest, whose mechanism, as well, is almost universal (2012: 31-32).

Thus it can be stated that in medieval times the cultural and religious incorporation into Hinduism and Islam became stronger. Through deforestation and cultivation of virgin soils the Mughal expansion further redefined the landscape of the territories of the Adivasi giving it the shape that it had when the British came. The areas which were still quite unaffected by the Mughals were the central Indian forests of Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. Here there still were indigenous kingdoms and sparse tribal Rajputs that fought outsiders as these would impose tribute payments (Kela, 2006: 504). Apart from the tribal kingdoms, along the West-East line of Central India, there was a continuum of Adivasi communities that had not been assimilated, but still interacted with outside powers in form of trading cultural exchange.

2.2.3 From the colonial period to our days

The previous section showed that despite the lack of an Adivasi historiography it is still possible to demonstrate that the Adivasi weren’t ahistorical at all, on the contrary they have always been engaged in various ways with state policies, as well as the processes of deforestation, peasantization and absorption of Adivasi into Hinduism (and Islam) were already going on. British colonialism drastically speed up these processes often with dramatic consequences for the Adivasi.

At the beginning of the 19th century vast portions of forest had already cleared out and turned into fields but the belt of central India stretching all way from Gujarat and Maharashtra to West Bengal was still covered in great part by thick forests. It has to be said that there wasn’t,
and probably there has never been, a clear cut between Adivasi and other farmers since many Adivasi were agriculturists themselves. However, while many Adivasi (probably the majority) had been (at some point in history) completely assimilated into the settled agriculture and were thus practically unrecognizable from other farmers, some differed in various ways.

Those who lived at the margins of the forests and inside the forests, usually combined different methods and technologies for practicing both settled and unsettled cultivation, as well as other forms of sustenance such as hunting and gathering. Hunting and gathering was for many societies an important mean of supplementing settled agriculture but very few were completely nomad hunters and gatherers (Hardiman, 1987: 12). Methods of cultivation differed from society to society and as Hardiman and Kela points out we cannot define Adivasi by these means since different societies used different methods and different technologies (1987: 12; 2006: 507).

Some communities would use only hand tools and practice slush-and-burn and shifting cultivation which typically implies nomadism to some extent, while those who used ploughs drawn by bullocks, were closer to the settled type of agriculture. This kind of unsettled ‘forest dwellers’ practicing slush-and-burn and shifting cultivation were surely a minority already then but it was them whom the British identified as indigenous and upon which they imposed the category of tribes. Through this encounter arose the stereotype of the uncivilized and irrational tribesman who according to Tabish Khair has sometimes described in colonial fiction “as a combination of the ‘noble savage’ and the ‘true Indian’ and was often used to denigrate the ‘cowardly’ and ‘untrue’ (in both senses) colonial Babu (quoted in Varma, 2015: 119)”.

In the course of the 19th century through British colonization the arable frontier was considerably extended by promoting and, at times forcing, settled agriculture and deforestation on the local communities. This meant radical changes in the methods of cultivation of the Adivasi inhabiting those regions. By the end of the century much of the tribal societies that had been left untouched by the Moguls were peasantized by the British in a system of exclusively settled agriculture mainly based on rice cultivation. The British systematically dismissed such methods of cultivation as slush-and-burn and shifting cultivation since these were not remunerative enough for the government. The pressure towards settled agriculture wasn’t meant to improve the conditions of the Adivasi, and in fact
it didn’t, but it was initialized to increase the revenue that the government could collect from them.

Das Gupta (2012b) shows how the Ho of Singhbhum were penalized by the introduction of settled agriculture. In her study case on the Ho she has found out that in precolonial and early colonial times the Ho would live on an interdependence of agriculture and forest use which would give them better chance to sustainment from one or the other source. As they turned to a uniform system of rice cultivation, they became totally dependent on the rains which, when failing, would inevitably result into famines. Shifting to settled agriculture caused deforestation from one side and the conversion of wasteland into fields on the other. For the Adivasi deforestation would mean to lose an important source of sustainment coming from forest products (fruits, wild roots, hunt, etc.) as well as to lose graze land for the cattle while the British would earn money from the commerce of timber.

The promotion of deforestation in colonial times relayed also on the belief that forests was a major cause of malaria (Hardiman, 1987: 73). In addition the fields created out of wasteland were ways less productive and more exposed to famines then the fields on fertile soils although the revenue collect from there was as high as for the more productive ones. The dependence on settled cultivation resulted in a row of agrarian crisis which inevitably led to emigration. From 1860 the demand for tribal labor increased remarkably in the tea industry of Assam and on the border between Bengal-Bhutan (Das Gupta, 2012b: 169). Along with the dislocation of many Adivasi the colonial period brought new settlers in the area inhabited by them. These were state functionaries, moneylenders, landlords, shop keepers, traders, liquor dealers and others who challenged the local social organization.

Tensions resulted in a number of rebellions against the British, the earliest dating back to the 18th century. The very first major revolt, the so called Paharia revolt, took place in 1776 in Jharkhand, followed by the Bundu revolt in 1797-98. Some of the major revolts that took place in the 19th century were the Munda revolt in Tamar in 1819-20, the Kol and Ho revolts in the same years, the Santal Hool in 1856 where thousands of Adivasis were killed and again the Ulgulaan under the leadership of Birsa Munda from 1895 to 1900 (Gupta, 2007: 14). This proneness to rebel might have contributed to the creation of the stereotype of the violent and lawless tribesman that the British condemned in a series of acts, and particularly the Criminal Tribes Acts. The first Criminal Tribes Act was enacted in 1871 in North India and later expanded to Bengal Presidency in 1876 and Madras Presidency in 1911. These acts didn’t comprehend only Adivasi communities but also various castes which were defined as
“addicted to systematic non-bailable offenses (Criminal Tribes Act (XXVII of 1871)”. It appears that despite the fact that the Indian National Congress had started taking up the issue of poverty eradication already in the late 19th century, it was delayed in recognizing the Adivasi problem. Only as late as the 1920s the suffering of Adivasi became an issue in the freedom movement (Shukla, 2011: 56).

Adivasi intellectuals tended to sympathize with the Congress. When Gandhi toured in the districts of Bihar quite a number of tribes supported him. Shukla argues that most of them (at least among the leaders) were Adivasi that had already converted to Vaishnavism and Bhakti movements and thus were able to understand Gandhi’s political rhetoric (2011: 56). Many Adivasi communities started to join the freedom movement and saw in Gandhi the figure of the savior, the one who would replace the British Raj and return their lands (Shukla, 2011: 56). Even though the Congress wanted to obtain the support of the Adivasi farmers they also sought to maintain good relations with the landlords, and by doing so they tended to put in second place the interest of the Adivasi (Shukla, 2011: 56). It was in the late 1930s that an Adivasi identity officially took form with the creation of the Adivasi Mahasabha founded and presided by Jaipal Singh. It is arguable whether this really had a positive influence and whether the educated Adivasi of the cities were really working for the people they represented but anyway they surely brought a new actor, even though a quite weak one, on the Indian political sphere.

In the Indian constitution a number of communities were defined as “Scheduled Tribes” in the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950. In this regard Dube questions the criteria applied to this categorization and argues that not all communities that were traditionally regarded tribal are included while others which historically were not considered tribal have been recognized as such (1977: 3, 4). This is unsurprising since any attempt to categorization would inevitably imply definition problems and in the case of the Adivasi the issue was also complicated by the fact that never before there had been a common identity. Anyway, the point to be made here is that the political recognition of the Adivasi not only didn’t take distances from the colonial orientalistic representation of them but on the contrary it perpetuated it. In 1952 Nehru held a speech at the “Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Areas Conference” where he spoke about the tribal people in independent India. Although Nehru sympathized with Adivasi it is evident that his view was pervaded by the colonial
romanticized image of the ‘noble savage’. Alessandra Marino commenting on Nehru’s speech writes:

The rhetoric used by Nehru reveals the perpetuation of colonial discourse through images that represent them as trapped in the “state of nature”. Historical change did not affect the tribals, who appear fixed in the image of “noble savages”. Because of their simplicity, even the violence they perpetrate is primitive and irrational (2014: 693).

However, despite Nehru’s sympathetic approach, the 1950s was a period of frenetic industrial and agricultural development that worsened Adivasi’s exploitation. Modernity brought new modes of exploitation as the construction of dams, glorified as the symbol of modern India at one side, and causing tremendous environmental damages on the other side which had profound repercussions on the people living in those areas. Similarly, mining companies have had and continue to have a huge environmental impact on lands inhabited by Adivasi.

Thus, the industrial development of the second half of the 20th century and the different kinds of soils exploitation clashing with the Adivasi have turned them into a symbol of eco-criticism. It has to be added that almost in parallel with the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order of 1950, the government of India officially ‘de-notified’ i.e. repealed in 1952 the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. According to the activist Mahasweta Devi this did not improve the situation for the denotified ones who continued to suffer abuses particularly from the police (2002). In 1959 the Habitual Offenders Act was passed which Devi defined as ‘not much different from the ‘Criminal Tribes Act, 1871’ (2002). This gained the attention of UN’s antidiscrimination body that as late as 2007 asked India to repeal the Habitual Offenders Act and affectively rehabilitated the denotified and nomadic tribes (Mohapatra, 2007).

2.3 Adivasi literature: issues and approaches

2.3.1 Introduction: the emergence of a new literary identity

It is no longer than a few decennials ago that a new current of literary writing that can be called “Modern Adivasi literature” has emerged, and only very recently it has gained the attention of academic criticism. This is a quite new trend in the Indian literary world and the third subaltern literature to have emerged on the scene following either patterns of the Dalit and feminist literatures. The languages of Modern Adivasi literature are the major regional languages especially Bangla, Odia, Marathi, Tamil and of course Hindi.

The scholar Ganga Sahay Mina categorizes this kind of literature as the third stage in the development of Adivasi literature as a whole. His chronological categorization is as follows:
1) the thousand-year-old oral literature consisting of folksongs and folktales inherited from the ancestors (purkhā sāhityā); 2) the written literature in Adivasi languages, especially Santali, Mundari and Kharia which employed the genres “taken from the outside societies and languages (bāhari samājom aur bhāṣāom se lī gaī haiṁ) and 3) the modern Adivasi writing (samkālīn ādivāsī lekhan) developed in the 1990s (2017: 46-48).

Attempts of temporal categorization are always questionable but it is quite agreeable that the Adivasi literature written in regional languages is a late innovation. Mina posits the rise of Modern Adivasi literature at the national level after 1991 as a mean of reaction and self-defense in response to the intensified exploitation of natural resources (2016). It is not by chance that in Suniti Kumar Chatterji’s article “‘Adivasi’ Literature of India: The Uncultivated ‘Adivasi’ Languages” published in 1971 there is mention of the traditional folktales and folksongs, and of the modern Santali literature but not of Adivasi literature written in regional languages (1971: 34).

This confirms that the phenomenon still did not exist at that time, or at best it was extremely marginal. Chatterji described the modern Santali literature as the product of educated Santals and as an “emulation of Bengali literature” (1971: 34). However, he added that “a genuine modern literature in Santali is now coming into being (1971: 34)” even if it remains unclear what he really meant by “a genuine modern literature”. The same he writes for Mundari and some other minor languages which followed the same pattern but with a lesser output (1971: 34).

The shift from Adivasi languages to the regional languages is not ascribable to different generations of writers but it is often due to a pragmatic decision made by the authors in order to reach out further. The shift is often irreversible i.e. it is hardly the case that Adivasi authors who have turned to regional languages, particularly Hindi, then go back to their native languages. Take the case of Nirmala Putul who started writing poetry in Santali and later moved to write in Hindi. This bears the implication that if at one side Modern Adivasi

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9 It is problematic to speak about “Adivasi languages” since it is unclear which languages shall be considered “Adivasi” and which not. Section 2.2 has pointed to the continuous process of assimilation of Adivasi in mainstream society which has resulted in a certain fluidity in the boundaries between Adivasi and non-Adivasi. This is reflected in the language situation as even major regional languages as Hindi, Bangla and Odisha are the mother tongues of many Adivasi. However, it seems that by “Adivasi languages” authors mean languages of any linguistic family that are directly associated with specific communities of Adivasi such as Bhil languages for the Bhil people, Santali for the Santal people, etc. This implies that while Santali and Ho (Austroasiatic), Bhili (Western Indo-Aryan), Kurukh (or Oraon, Dravidic) and the Kuki-Chin languages (Sino-Tibetan, spoken in the state of Mizoram) are considered Adivasi languages, Hindi, Bangla and Tamil are not. Obviously this does not take account of the fact that Adivasi people have also Hindi, Bangla and Tamil as mother tongues.
literature in regional languages is flourishing and getting more attention, the same is somewhat less true for Adivasi literature in Adivasi languages.

The concept of ‘Adivasi identity’ (ādivāsī asmitā), as shown in the previous section, was born out of a socio-political discourse following the examples of the Dalit and feminist identities. This process of awakening of the identities is therefore called ‘identitism’ (asmitāvād) (Mina, 2016). Successively the political identity gained a literary sense. Even in the literary discourse the Adivasi identity is the last to have emerged as a ‘subaltern Hindi literature’, after the Hindi Dalit literature and Hindi feminist literature. The work of Ramnika Gupta, editor of the monthly magazine Yudhrat ām ādmī and founder of the Ramnika Foundation, has played an important role for the development of a space for Adivasi literature. Mina describes Modern Adivasi literature as:

[...] the literature of a search for identity, of exposing the past and the present forms of exploitation by outsiders, and of threats to tribal identity and existence, and resistance. [...] It supports their right to protect their water resources, forests and land and their right to self-determination (2016).

Thus, the keywords of Modern Adivasi literature are mainly three: identity, exploitation and resistance.

Understanding the aims of Modern Adivasi literature can throw some light on the reasons of the above mentioned shift from Adivasi languages to regional languages. If it is true, as Chatterji and Mina claimed, that Adivasi literature in Adivasi languages generally emulated the literatures in regional languages then, that kind of literature shall be intended as an ‘Adivasi literature for Adivasi’ or at best for linguists and anthropologists, while Modern Adivasi literature based on the affirmation of the Adivasi identity and the resistance to exploitation bears a message ‘from the Adivasi for all the non-Adivasi’. In light of this, one can assume that such literature is meant to be delivered in more widely comprehended languages.

Along with the attempts of chronological categorization of Adivasi literature as whole, there are also classifications pertaining the Modern Adivasi literature in the specific. Defining and categorizing is always a difficult task and it is not the purpose of this paper to overcome such difficulties. However, it is important to account for the categorizations which have been

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10 Dalit literature developed first in Marathi in the 1960s and later on in other regional languages. The beginning of Hindi feminist literature has been placed by Indu Prakash Pandey in 1958 with Krishna Sobti’s novel Dār se bīcūṛī and its development through the following decennial (Pandey, 1989: 13-14).

11 See https://aamadiorg.blogspot.com/
proposed so far. In his book Ādivāsī cīntan kī bhūmikā Mina recognizes three types of Modern Adivasi literature: the literature written on Adivasi, the literature written by Adivasi and the literature written by Adivasi on the basis of the ādivāsī darśan (2017: 41). What is most striking is that literature written by non-Adivasi is also included which could hardly be the case in Dalit literary criticism. Another scholar who includes the writings of non-Adivasi in the realm of Adivasi literature is Vir Bharat Talwar. He identifies no less than three categories of Adivasi literature written by non-Adivasi and one written by Adivasi. These are: 1) the literature of those authors whose knowledge about Adivasi is only superficial; 2) the literature of those authors who have lived for long periods near the Adivasi. These authors feel empathy for them and are somehow acquainted with their societies; 3) the literature of those authors who have lived long among the Adivasi and have seen most aspects of their life and put effort in understanding them and 4) the literature written by Adivasi, be it in their ‘original languages’ (mūl bhāṣāom) or other regional languages (quoted in Mina, 2017: 41). Interestingly, here the language choice seems to not be a big issue. Of different opinion is the Adivasi writer Vandana Tete who explicitly stated that Adivasi literature is only that one written by Adivasi (quoted in Mina, 2017: 43). This leads to what is a very central topic not only of the Modern Adivasi literature but of all subaltern literatures i.e. the problem of authenticity of representation. This will be the topic of the next section.

2.3.2 Problematizing the authenticity of literary representation

In the beginning of section 2.2.1 the problem of representation was mentioned from a historical perspective. From the perspective of the literary discourse the issue of representation faces similar discussions. Hindi literary criticism regarding Dalit and feminist literature first, and later on also Adivasi literature, often makes use of two terms: anubhūti and sahānubhūti. Both words are Sanskrit compounds sharing the noun bhūti meaning ‘state of being, existence’ to which in the first case the adding of anu- ‘after, according’ gives it the meaning of the own perception or feeling and thus the ‘(personal) experience’. This term is similar to svānubhūti which more strongly emphasizes the sense of self-experience. Both are used in contrast to sahānubhūti i.e. the feeling or perception that one experiences with someone else (saha means ‘together, with’). sahānubhūti can thus be translated as

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12 A brief discussion with Ganga Sahay Mina has clarified what he means by ādivāsī darśan. Broadly speaking, the term refers to the more or less fixed set of worldviews shared by Adivasi. Even though it would be interesting to see whether a set of worldviews shared by all Adivasi really exists, and in that case how it can be described, this challenge goes beyond the purpose of this paper.

13 For a discussion of the term ‘empathy’ see next section.

14 The prefix sva- means ‘self’. 
‘sympathy’, ‘empathy’ or ‘compassion’. These concepts are often invoked to distinguish ‘authentic’ Dalit, feminist and Adivasi literature from the rest of literature about Dalits, women and Adivasi which is not written by Dalits, women and Adivasi. Thus, literary representation must be sustained by self-experience in order to be authentic (prāmāṇik).

In other words Dalit literature becomes per definition literature written by Dalit authors and the same is true for feminist literature. In this regard Adivasi criticism is somewhat less sharp (see previous section). It is not accidental then, that Dalit and feminist literatures have a marked autobiographical character as they aim at describing their own experience (anubhav). The same is not completely true for Adivasi literature which has a less preponderance for autobiographies. Mina argues that Adivasi literature did not develop the same autobiographical style for the reason that the center of the Adivasi life is the community rather than the self (2017: 45). Whether this claim is correct can be argued however, Wessler observes that the perception of Dalit writing as being autobiographical is itself problematic. According to him the current output of Dalit literature is not entirely referable to the literary intention of the authors but rather to the market’s demand for Dalit autobiographies, an attitude that several Dalit authors even complain (2019: 11).

These narratives (Dalit, feminist and Adivasi) are typically characterized by marginalization and exploitation, and the grief and sufferings that come along. Thus, the argument of ‘authenticity coming from self-experience’ relays on the assumption that only one who has experienced suffering in first person is able to represent it in a truthful way. In the case of the Dalits, this exclusiveness of representation has enabled them to create new standards and new aesthetics based on what is called Dalit cetnā i.e. Dalit consciousness, a concept going back to Ambedkar (1851-1956). The Dalit author and critic Sharankumar Limbale defined Dalit literature as “writing about Dalits by Dalit writers with a Dalit consciousness” (2004: 19).

However, Brueck points out that the debate about authenticity in the Dalit literary discourse is political in nature rather than literary and therefore unresolvable since it is grounded on ideologies and not on literary analysis (2013: 349). On the same line goes Hunt who argues that Dalit writers have curved out a space in the field of Hindi literature over which they can assert control (2014: 210). This, she continues, enables them to compete with established authors on the basis of their own aesthetics despite the fact that Dalit literature has sometimes been dismissed for being “too crude or too political” and anyway not good enough for the standards of Hindi literature (Hunt, 2014: 217).
The same concepts, terminology and arguments are also employed in Adivasi literary criticism but with less exclusive tones. Singh and Mina write that:

Today the discussion on empathy and self-experience is continuously ongoing. Also the authors writing through empathy believe in the question of self-experience. They give much importance to writers who composes on the basis of a suffered reality, as they have learnt quite a lot about that literature. The Adivasi authors insist that literature written by non-Adivasi on the life of Adivasi is literature of Adivasi compassion and not literature of Adivasi consciousness (2014: 112).

The main argument sustained by those who dismiss the literature written by non-Adivasi is more or less the same as in the case of Dalit literature i.e. that empathy-driven literature is incapable of representing in an authentic way the sufferings of the Adivasi. Singh and Mina remark this point:

[…] they [the Adivasi writers/critics] dismiss the literature written by non-Adivasi calling it ‘Adivasi consciousness’ or Adivasi empathy. Their argumentation is that the sufferings, the sorrow and pain of the Adivasi can only be known by themselves (2014: 113).

This is the opinion of for example Ramnika Gupta:

But this literature born out of their experience cannot be intended as Adivasi literature. It can be taken as expression of their feelings and perception, it can be called literature of empathy (quoted in Singh and Mina, 2014: 114).

Mina however questions the usefulness on insisting on the dichotomy anubhūti/svānubhūti versus sahānubhūti:

It is true that authentic expression is not possible without long experience, close contact and sensitivity, especially with reference to Adivasi, but despite this, self-experience cannot be made the only basis (2016).

Singh and Mina also try to go beyond the dichotomy claiming that “De facto, all literature produced in the interest of Adivasi is real Adivasi literature, be it based on self-experience or

15 āj sahānubhūti aur svānubhūti ke savāl par bhī lagātār bahas jārī hai. sahānubhūti ke taar par likhne vāle lekhak bhi svānubhūti ke savāl ko mānte haiṃ. ve bhoge hue yathārtha kā srjan karne vāle ko is kāran bhī zyāda mahattva dete hain kyoñki sāhitya-racnā ke lie unhome kōfī kuch sikhā hai. ādivāsi racnākārom kā āgrah itnā hi hotā hai ki gair-ādivāsi racnākārom kā ādivāsi-jivan par likhā gayā sāhitya ādivāsi-sahānubhūti kā sāhitya hotā hai, ādivāsi cetnā kā nahīṃ.

16 […] gair-ādivāsi dvārā race sāhitya ko ve ‘ādivāsi cetnā’ yā ādivāsi sahānubhūti kā sāhityā kahkar khāri k j détai hain. unkā tark hai ki ādivāsi kī pirā, du:kh-dard ke keval vah swayom hi jān saktā hai.

17 par yah unkā anubhavjanya sāhitya prāmānīk ādivāsi sāhitya nahīṃ māṃ jā saktā hai. ise unkā mahsūs karne ki, unkā ahasāri kī abhivyakti māṃ jā saktā hai, sahānubhūti kā sāhityā kahā jā saktā hai.

18 yah sac hai ki lambe anubhav, nikaṭ sampark aur saṁvedanā ślā kē binā prāmānīk abhivyakti sambhav nahīṃ hai, khāśkār ādivāsi sandarbh mēṃ, lekin iske bāvājūd svānubhūti ko ekmatr ādhār nahīṃ banāyā jā saktā.
empathy-driven (2014: 113)”. According to this interpretation what makes Adivasi literature ‘Adivasi’ is its aim rather than the author’s ethnic background.

The dichotomy anubhūti and sahānubhūti as well as the concept of ‘authenticity’ used in an essentialist sense are anyway not free from internal issues. Adivasi identity, as the Dalit identity and all identities related to caste are, as gender, hereditary and can’t be negotiated. However, the concept of personal experience as only mean of authentic representation is problematic and limiting. It is problematic since it does not account for the fact that self-experience is fixed to the time when it occurred and the time between the experience and the narration of it already entails some distance between the experience and the experiencer. It is therefore open to discussion what effect such distance has. It is often the case that strong experiences need time to be elaborated before one can write about them.

If a comparison was to be done then the case of Bhisham Sahni in the realm of partition literature is quite telling. Sahni wrote most of his works from the 1960s onwards. Tamas, perhaps his most acclaimed novel, is from 1974, i.e. 27 years after partition. Wessler makes a similar comparison with American writing about slavery and with the writings of holocaust survivors (2019: 19). This may illustrate that a certain gap between the (traumatic) experience made and the process of (therapeutic) writing is inevitable. If this is true, the direct link between experience and literary reflection is in fact indirect from the very beginning. Then it might be the case that the literary creativity not only tolerate distance from experience but perhaps even requires it. Personal experience as the only mean of authentic representation is also limiting as it excludes other forms of writing that are not strictly autobiographic. Moreover, the term personal experience suggests the idea of a unique experience alike for all the members of the category. Thus, equating authentic experience with the whole category (be it Dalits, women or Adivasi) and with the very concept of authenticity can lead to paradoxes. For example, if a Dalit who has not suffered physic violence writes about such an incident he is not really writing through personal anubhūti but rather through sahānubhūti.

Literary written on the basis of anubhūti can be questioned and in fact it has already happened in the case of Dalit literature. Hunt has observed that a new generation of Dalit writers have put into question the capacity of representation of the established Dalit writers:

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19 vastut: ādivāsīṁ ke hitorn ke lie racā sāhitya hī saccā ādivāsī sāhitya hai, cāhe vah svānubhūti kā ho yā sahānubhūti kā.
A new criticism has recently been launched against Hindi Dalit writers by several ‘young challengers’, writers of Dalit identity who vehemently proclaim that the established Hindi Dalit writers do not represent them (2014: 242). This point is emblematic because it challenges the reliability of precisely that anubhūti that was meant to be at the basis of the only true Dalit literature and that was acting dismissively with regard to all sahānubhūti based literature. Therefore anubhūti and sahānubhūti shall perhaps not be understood as forming a contrastive binary, and neither shall they be fixed on the categories. They should rather be understood as different sources of narrative representation, both at work and overlapping each other. Then the perspective of the author who writes years after a traumatic experience can be understood as a certain kind of sahānubhūti-like writing while the perspective of whom made the sufferings of the other his own can be seen as a certain kind of anubhūti-like perspective.

Essentializations can be harmful even the way around, and in fact Dalit authors tend to be stuck under that label by criticism and publishers who see them only as Dalit authors writing on Dalit issues. Similarly, there seems to be a bias in feminist/female identity formation and literary creativity, as it may be illustrated by the fiction-writer Krishna Sobti (1925-2019) who refused to be labelled as feminist author and the same is true for Jacinta Kerketta who rejects both designations female/Adivasi even though her poetry reveals her femininity and ethnic background (Wessler, 2019: 17).

Perhaps the phenomenon of categorical inclusion and exclusion in the Hindi literary sphere derives from or somehow reflects the 19th century’s colonial tradition of socio-political, non-negotiable categorization, but this would require further investigation. The only conclusion that can be drawn here is that the concepts related to representation as authenticity, personal experience and empathy bares a lot of problematic issues oscillating between literary studies proper and social and political discourses, hardly reducible to fixed categories.

Along with the problem of categorizing and defining Adivasi literature there are also many other issues that require attention. For instance, a conceptualization of the aesthetics of Adivasi literature has not been fully investigated yet. In this sense Modern Adivasi literary criticism is still somewhat behind compared to, for example, Dalit literature where valuable theoretical work has already been done (e.g. Limbale, 2004; Gajarawala, 2013; Hunt, 2014; Brueck, 2013, 2014).
2.3.3 Adivasi literature in the post-colonial discourse

Post-colonial literature refers to those literatures which have developed in countries affected by imperial domination, and more specifically by European imperial domination. The term embraces an enormous stock of literature produced by a long row of countries from all parts of the world. In practice all African countries, all South Asian countries, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, Canada, South American countries and others have all developed post-colonial literature. In their groundbreaking study on post-colonial literature Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin defined it as “emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tensions with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre [sic]” (1989: 2).

Gilbert and Tompkins in their introduction to post-colonial drama warn us to not consider the term post-colonialism as a temporal concept but rather “as an engagement with and contestation of colonialism discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies” (1996: 2). In fact they argue that post-colonialism is “a textual effect and a reading strategy” (1996: 2) with a political aim i.e. “that of the continued destabilization of the cultural and political authority of imperialism (1996: 3)”. Then the subaltern literatures discussed in the previous sections can all be interpreted from a post-colonialist perspective.

The case of Adivasi literature is particularly well-fit into the post-colonial discourse. The denunciation of the exploitation of land and natural resources and all the issues related with it are very similar to those of the African and South-Asian countries in the 19th century. The main difference is that Adivasi exploitation is not carried on by a foreign nation anymore, but by companies often with open government support of the same state that Adivasi belong to. Not that Adivasi weren’t exploited by the British. This has been already illustrated in the section 2.2.3. Thus, it can be argued that colonialism never ended for the Adivasi, what has changed is the hegemonic power. The contemporary exploitation of the Adivasi is a form of internal colonialism. Gilbert and Tompkins make use of the term neo-imperialism to designate modern forms of inequality between cultures or groups which are less ‘formalized’ than those of the 19th century in the sense that these are not sustained by military force but by economic and political pressure (1996: 257). This is exactly the case of the Adivasi and many other communities around the world.

Another key-point of post-colonial literature is the reaction to cultural hegemony. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have pointed to the risk for post-colonial literatures (in English) to be
understood as “off-shoots of English literature […] which relegate them to marginal and subordinate positions” (1989: 7). However, they also add that the relegation of post-colonial literatures at the margins has the counter effect of destabilizing the center of consciousness which ends in the situation where all experiences become “uncentred [sic], pluralistic and multifarious” (1989: 12). In fact, in the case of Adivasi literature Trivedi and Burke argue that:

When the center-margin equation is reversed, the center is no longer the center, likewise the margin is no longer the margin. Seen from an egalitarian perspective, writing by Adivasis constitute the ‘alternative canon’ and it is by recognizing this fact that these writings are given the significance that is due to them (2018: ix).

Thus, writings by Adivasi becomes per se “a means of assertion against the socio-cultural oppression and hegemony” (Trivedi and Burke, 2018: x).

The common ground of post-colonial literature does not prevent it for being extremely diversified. A typical feature that characterizes the exploitation of the Adivasi as well as many other communities around the world, is environmental degradation. Ecological issues related to the exploitation of natural resources are of course not new for South-Asia or the world in general. In the sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 of this paper it has been illustrated how deforestation has been a constant through Indian history but the pollution of the soils and water springs is a phenomenon typical of modernity. Thus the narrative denunciation contained in Adivasi literature deals also with this phenomenon. The soils of the Adivasi’s lands, especially in the areas between Jharkhand and Odisha are rich of minerals such as coal, iron and bauxite and are therefore a target for mining companies.

The literary language also offers parallels with more classic post-colonial literature. In the imperialist projects of the 19th century European languages, especially English in the case of South-Asia, were imposed as a mean of control on the dominated countries (see Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989: 7 and Gilbert and Tompkins, 1996: 164). Language in the colonial context works as a tool for installing and securing hierarchical structures. However, what typically happens is that the language of the oppressor is adopted by the oppressed as part of a process for which Homi Bhabha has introduced the term “mimicry”. More than that, the adaptation of language is the first step in the act of ‘writing back’. Therefore, Indian authors typically defined as post-colonial are those writing in English as Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie and Amitav Gosh, to cite just a few, whose international popularity is also due to their use of English. Similarly many Adivasi authors have adopted regional languages, Hindi
in particularly (see section 2.3.1) as writing language. The collection of Hindi poems written by different Adivasi authors *Kalam ko tīr hone do* (let the pen be the weapon) edited by Ramnika Gupta explicitly suggests that the pen shall be the weapon of resistance and its language in this case is Hindi.

2.3.4 The representation of the other in the post-colonial discourse and beyond

The issue of the representability of the subaltern-other was already mentioned in the historical and political discourse (see section 2.2.1) but its debate in a literary sense needs to be taken up separately. If the major problem in the historical representation of the Adivasi was the lack of apposite archives, the major concern from a post-colonial perspective seems to be rather ethic and epistemological in nature. The risks in the representation of the other, leading to the creation of stereotypes have been discussed quite a lot through the post-colonial discourse. In the highly acclaimed and debated *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said showed the various way in which the oriental other has been mystified, romanticized, and sexualized by the westerners. On the same line goes Bhabha who sees the stereotypes with their ‘fixity’ as the major feature in the construction of otherness in colonial discourse (1994: 66). Bhabha lifted up other important aspects of the colonial discourse such as that of by mimicry i.e. the tendency of the colonized to imitate the culture of the colonizers (1994: 86) and the hybridization of cultures (1994: 112).

However, the strongest point remains perhaps that of Gayatri Spivak (1988) who argued for the unrepresentability of the subaltern-other, who as in the example of the suicide of Bhubaneswari, is both silenced by the elite intellectuals speaking for it and represented in a distorted way. However, Rashmi Varma has recently challenged this thesis, proving that through different strategies “writers and intellectuals on the one hand, and subalterns on the other, can forge projects of solidarity such that the subaltern does not remain mute, but speaks through his or her political voice and transforms into a proper political subject (2015: 125)”. Varma’s argumentation is based on the analysis of three texts: Mahasweta Devi’s novella *Pterodactyl* (1995), Gopinath Mohanty’s novel *Paraja* and Upamanyu Chatterjee’s novel *English August* (1988). All these short stories deal with different aspects of the Adivasi while none of the authors is an Adivasi himself or herself. Varma argues that in Devi’s story the encounter between the Adivasi and the non-Adivasi character gets them both involved in a political project of representation. In the case of Mohanty’s novel, Varma asserts that “far from failing at representation or narrativizing its limits, the novel narrates the process by which the ‘other’ consciousness can be grasped (2015: 114)” and in the conclusion she states
that “in the ending of all three stories, the subaltern social group is shown as developing a consciousness of exploitation, although in very different ways (2015: 125)”. Clearly, Varma’s interpretation and conclusions can be confronted but in any case her contribution leaves the discussion open, or re-opens the discussion on whether the representation of the other is really impossible and whether it really silences the subaltern.

3. THE AUTHOR AND THE SHORT STORIES

3.1 The author

3.1.1 Introduction

All information regarding the author that is given in the next section, with the partial list of his works as the only exception, are based on a Skype interview made on 1st March 2019 and on an exchange of e-mails done during the following months. The author of this paper and Vinod Kumar were the only participants of the Skype interview which the latter kindly consented to be recorded. The interview was conducted in Hindi and it was recorded using the software program Callnote. The file is currently private property of the author of this paper. The poor sound quality found during the course of the interview caused problems in the mutual understanding to the participants. For this reason and due to the fact that the interview was carried on in a quite informal way it was necessary to supplement the interview with additional questions. The additional questions were asked via e-mail. The Skype interview was later on transcribed. However, for the purpose of this paper, a selection was made excluding from the transcription those parts that the author of this paper did not consider directly pertinent to the questions asked. Thus, the transcription reproduces roughly ten minutes of the all interview which is almost one hour long. Vinod Kumar requested to receive a copy of the transcribed interview in order to correct possible grammatical ‘impurities’ which the author of this paper consented to. It has to be specified that the revised version of the interview is not different in its contents to the pre-revision version. The transcription of the Skype interview and that of the e-mails were merged together in order to form a uniform text. This text was transliterated according to the conventions used for the transliteration of Hindi words used in this paper (see page 4) and eventually translated into English. The interview is found at the end of this paper in both English translation (Appendix 2) and in Hindi (Appendix 3).

20 A partial list of Vinod Kumar’s published works is given in his latest book (Adivāsi jīvan-jagat kī bārah kahāniyāṁ, ek nāṭak) which is the collection of short stories analyzed in this paper. Therefore the question about his previous works was not taken up in the interview.
3.1.2 The author's biography

Vinod Kumar was born in Patna, Bihar, on the 5th September 1956. He spent his childhood and adolescence roaming around Bihar, following his father who, due to his job as a functionary in the governmental administration, was transferred every three years. In the early 1970s he was studying in a college in Patna. As many other young students did, he joined the chātr yuvā saṅghaś vāhinī (lit. ‘Student and youth struggle brigade’), a student and youth movement of Bihar under the leadership of the activist and socialist thinker Jayprakash Narayan. After the turmoil of 1974, the state of emergency of the Indira Gandhi’s years and finally the new elections in 1977 (see Metcalf and Metcalf, 2012: 255), Kumar went, following the directive of Jayprakash Narayan, to do social work in rural areas. He stood about four years in an Adivasi area of the East Singhbhum district, in today’s state of Jharkhand, on the border with West Bengal. Then he married a Telugu woman with whom he got three children.

After the experience as social worker he took up his studies again and received a MA degree in Hindi from Ranchi University. He then started working as journalist for Prabhāt Khabar (founded in Ranchi in 1984) whose editor at that time was Harivansh Narayan Singh (now Deputy Chairman of the Rajya-Sabha, the upper house of the Indian Parliament). The experience with journalism has had a great impact on him as he told in an interview with the author of this paper (see Appendix 2). Kumar had a great passion for his work but disapproved the ways in which the newspaper had to ‘compromise’ for getting advertisement. He often ended in quarrels with his editor and he slowly became disillusioned about journalism and ultimately he left the newspaper. Nowadays he works with organizations in favor of the Adivasi, writing articles as an independent journalist and literature about Adivasi.

About his writings he says that he mostly describes what he have seen in his experience among the Adivasi taking his characters, although with some changes, directly from reality. In the short story Ek dunyā alag sī, there is a strong resemblance with his own experience from the first years in an Adivasi area. Bhūrī âmkheṁ, dealing with the struggles of a journalist, is also very autobiographical. In other cases, such as Ek thī Enī, the story is inspired by facts that he has been told while, yet other stories are more the product of his fantasy. In his youth he was influenced by Bengali literature, especially Tagore, Sarat Chandra and Tarasankar. However, his literary career began much later, only after he left

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21 Indian newspapers relay largely on the funds coming from the advertisement.
Prabhāt Khabar. He has written three novels: *samar śeṣ hai* (War is over), *mišan Jhārkhanḍ* (Mission Jharkhand) and *red jon* (Red zone)\(^{22}\); a novella: *ḍāyarī ke cand aśīl panne* (Some pages of an indecent diary) and among his other books: *ādivāsi saṅghars gāthā* (Song of the Adivasi exploitation), *vikās kī avadhāranā* (The achievement of progress) and *ṭunḍī kī ṭraijaḍī* (Tundi’s tragedy).

The main subject of his writings are Adivasi societies and life. He is particularly focused on the communities living in Jharkhand and in the bordering states of Odisha, West Bengal and Bihar. He affirms that the long experience among the Adivasi has taught him a lot about their roots and perspectives which enables him to write about Adivasi with a certain ease.

Regarding religion Kumar calls himself an atheist. His father wasn’t religious either and his mother, although she might have might to some extant, followed the example of the father.

3.2 The short stories

3.2.1 *Ek duniyā alag sī*

3.2.1.1 Summary

*Ek duniyā alag sī* depicts the visit of a man in an Adivasi village where a friend of him lives - Mārdī the chief of the village. The village is *Butgorā*, an existing locality of the East Singhbhum district (in the story *siṅhbhūm zilā*) of Jharkhand. The story begins with the two going to a market some kilometers away from the village. Here Mārdī shows his friend how the local people make their living by bringing goods, especially vegetables, animals and wood, from their villages and the forest to the market and try to sell them or to change them with other goods as ornaments and saris. They spend quite some time there and when they return to village it’s already dark. As they reach the village they notice that people are gathered, and a lantern hanging from a roof throws some light on two men bound with a rope on their waists. As they approach the scene they are taken into a house where soon the party leader of the village (Hindi *dalpati*) Bhāgvat arrives, accompanied by the *sarpāṃc* (the head of the village panchayat). They start talking to Mārdī in a language that the visitor does not understand and when he asks for an explanation he comes to know about what has happened. The bound men are *Kisun Mānjhī* and a friend of him which, earlier that day, together with some other people had threatened with shouts and weapons another villager, Bāgī Mānjhī, after that this one had harvested a piece of land that *Kisun* claimed for himself. Hearing the

\(^{22}\) These novels and the rest of his work have not been translated into English. The translation of the titles is mine.
bustle, the guards of the village and Bhāgvat rushed there and captured Kisun and one of his fellows. The two prisoners are taken into the house where they pass the night altogether, with Kisun and his fellow sleeping in Māṛḍī’s bed and the others sleeping on the ground. Bhāgvat keeps talking to the visitor explaining him the state of lawlessness that pervades that area and then asks him to become officer in the district so that he can bribe him. The story ends in the next morning with Bhāgvat mocking the two prisoners, mimicking a dialogue where these two try to bribe the police in exchange of freedom, making everyone around laugh.

3.2.1.2 Analysis

From the very first lines the reader is introduced to what is the setting of the whole narration:

I had a great desire to see an Adivasi village from close range, that’s why one day I went to my friend Māṛḍī’s place (23).23

The narrator, speaking in first person, tells about his visit to an Adivasi village. He is not himself an Adivasi and has no deep knowledge about them. Thus, he needs a guide, an Adivasi person who can lead him around and explain things for him. This duty is personified by his friend Māṛḍī. The cultural gap between the narrator and the Adivasis comes up at different times through the narration. When he asks what is going on at the village the response is: “You will not understand. This is a village-countryside issue (24)”.24 This statement reflects the cultural distance between the two and it also suggests that such distance may result in the impossibility for a dikū to understand the village’s issues. Towards the end of the story when all people go to bed the narrator advises Bhāgvat to not take off his clothes otherwise he will feel cold at night, but he seems to not getting the point.

‘Wear your clothes while sleeping otherwise you will feel cold.’

‘I should wear my clothes?’ (26)25

Beside the elements of cultural misunderstanding there also are narrative fragments that are presented with irony, perhaps even cynical irony. The whole process against Kisun is carried on in a rather informal and disorganized way on the limit of absurdity. The two aggressors are bound with ropes on their waist and set under the light of a lantern in the middle of the village. Against this apparently severe treatment it appears later on that their weapons have not even been confiscated. The narrator, feeling compassion for the poor guys, argues against

23 meri bahut lāsā thī ki mainādīvāsī gāṛv ko karīb se dekhūṁ, išī́e main ek din apne mitr māṛḍī ke yahāṁ pahuṁc gayā.
24 āp nahīṁ samajhiegā [sic]. gāṛv-dehānt kā māmālmā hai.
25 ‘kapre pahane so jāo, varṇā tānd lagegī.’
‘kapre pahane so jāūṁ...?’
keeping them bound with ropes. Bhāgvat laughs at him and responds: “how would you work if you were a jail officer? (26)”. The narrator points out that he did not catch them but on the contrary they followed him to the village to get bound in a second moment which means that binding them is not necessary. However, this does not convince Bhāgvat who responds:

We have the power of the police. We bound them with a rope, beat them and brought them here. We have an order from the chief (26).27

The harsh treatment reflects the mimicking of the mainstream use of physical violence by police officers despite the idea of secular state law that they represent. However, this aspect is later on contradicted when they go to bed. The two prisoners get to sleep in the village’s chief’s bed while he sleeps on the floor. These behaviors might seem paradoxical for an outsider but the paradoxes arise as a consequence of having together different cultural elements, in part typical for the local culture and in part coming from the outside world. The fact of sleeping in the same house and letting the ‘guest’ sleep in the owner’s bed might represent the local habit while the pseudo-judicial process and law enforcement represents the attempt to adopt or imitate the law system imposed from outside by the government. The attempt of adopting a foreign set of practices results, in this case, in situations that are almost comical. At the very end of the story Bhāgvat is mocking Kisun in an improvised acted dialogue between the police officer and the captured making all people around to laugh:

An angry Bhāgvat was saying to Kisun— ‘is there chicken?’
Kisun said with a shy smile— ‘no…’
And Bhāgvat burst— ‘when the inspector asks whether you keep chicken you have to answer ‘I will give you chicken sir’’.
And again he started acting how an inspector shouts at a thief.
‘Why did you beat him, speak! Otherwise I will tear out your eyes…’
And the thief said— ‘I will give you two hundred rupees sir’
The inspector shouted again— ‘Why you beat him? I will break your eyes…’
And the thief said— ‘I will give three hundred Sir’
Everybody around Bhāgvat burst into a loud laugh (27).28

26 yadi áp jehal [sic] kā afasar hotā to kaise kām kartā.
27 hamko pulis kā pāvar hai. ham unhem rossē se bāndhkar pīnte hue yahām lātā [sic]27, mukhiyā jī kā ādeś hai hamko.
28 Bhāgvat āg tāpate hue Kisun se kah rahā thā— ‘murgā hai?’
Kisun ne bhoī muskān ke sāth kahā— ‘nahīṁ...’
The different cultural elements clashes with each other. The rural background of the village works as an unsteady platform upon which the attempt to accommodate to the modern conventions become clumsy. The performance of Bhāgvat in the dialogue above is a serious attempt to represent the law of the dikū but in fact it has the opposite effect and the people around interpret it as a comic sketch. Mimicry plays an overall important role. Indian judiciary and police are being mocked throughout all the story.

Along with the interpretation of the law system comes the issue of corruption. The law system is mocked in all his aspect, the sarpāṅic looks for the written version of the Indian penal code without finding it: “the book was not retrieved (25)”.

The immediate search for the book is a relevant aspect because it suggests the complete trust in the written law of the dikū and it would be used (if found) as powerful tool, even regarding an internal affair.

Thereafter, Bhāgvat instructs Kisun in how to please and even bribe the officer once he will find himself at the police station. When everybody goes to bed Bhāgvat explains to the narrator how all officers are corrupted taking ten rupees fine where it would be enough with one rupee so that they can keep the rest for themselves. However, he is not really critical, on the contrary he himself is a part of that and proposes to the narrator to become officer in the district so that he can bribe him. The critique on corruption might not come from the Adivasi characters themselves through this story, but it is easy to see an overall criticism on the outside corrupted system spreading where it did not use to belong to.

The political system of the village is in itself a mimicking form of the panchayat rule. In fact the main characters are: the political leader of the village (Hindi dalpati, i.e. Bhāgvat), the sarpāṅic (the head of the village panchayat) and the chief of the village (Hindi mukhyā,

29 kitāb nahīṁ mili.

30 It is unsure whether the form of panchayat referred to in the narration would be the traditional Hindu panchayat system or the modern form of local administration introduced by a constitutional amendment in 1992 on the basis of the traditional system.
i.e. Mārdī). Normally the sarpāmic is himself the head of the village, therefore the fact that the village has both a sarpāme and a chief might be part of the clumsy mimicry of the dikū’s political system.

There are both elements of sedentary agriculture as the rice fields harvested around the village with the use of bullock cart and of other activities perhaps hunt, signaled by the mention of bow and arrows.

The language spoken by the villagers is Hindi. However, there is mention of another language that the narrator does not understand, perhaps Santali31. It might be the case that the villagers used the local language among themselves and Hindi when talking to the narrator even if this is not made explicit. It appears that the Hindi in the dialogues between villagers is to be understood as a translation from the local language. However, the Hindi used by the villagers deviates from the standard Hindi, for example: kyūṁ for kyoṁ, ihāṁ for yahāṁ, kaīse for kaise, zillā for zilā32, hajaur for huzūr and the English word jail as jehal. The use of such words together with some ungrammatical forms (e.g. ham lātā see above) don’t suggest linguistic slips and cannot be random either, on the contrary they reflect the conscious choice of the author to give a rural speech.

The setting of the plot is mainly the Adivasi village. There is not much information about how the village looks like. There is mention of the fields all around, and of a bewitched well in its proximity which suggests a rural area in any case. A village called Buṭgorā situated in the East Singhbhum district exists as well as Kālikāpur. The narration does not begin in the village but at the country market (grāmīṇ hāṭ) some km outside the village on the way to Kālikāpur. The weekly market has historically played a fundamental role in the economy of the Adivasi regions. Trading centers for exchange of goods functioned also as platforms for encounter between the Adivasi and dikū, in particular traders, moneylenders and artisans (compare Hardiman, 1987: 81). The narrator mentions a predominance of women in the market carrying baskets of rice or alternatively chickens and ducks. Others are coming with bundles of wood. Among the many women and girls present at the market one in particular catches the attention of the narrator:

31 Neither the language nor the community are specified. Jharkhand hosts 32 Scheduled Tribes which speak a variety of languages. For an overview over Jharkhand’s Scheduled Tribes see Menz and Hansda (2010).

32 It is unclear whether the pronunciation would be zilā/zillā or jilā/zillā since nuqtā is never written.
...at a shop of ornaments I saw a girl gazing at her reflection coming from a small mirror, shining from her youth, she was sticking a big āṭīkā on her brow. Seeing such a big āṭīkā even the setting sun would feel ashamed (23-24). It is clear that the narrator is fascinated by the young girl. It could even be argued that the kind of attraction felt by the narrator might be a sort of romantic orientalism. The girl in question (probably an Adivasi) represents the other for the narrator, an exotic ‘other’ that exerts a magnetic power on him. The use of āṭīkā by the Adivasi girl except for having a sensual tone might also signal a moment of encroachment of the two worlds, that of the Adivasi with that of the dikū.

3.2.2 Kāṭh cāhie

3.2.2.1 Summary

Three men are sitting in a room of a house. One of them, the narrator, is a dikū who has come there to do some work in the Adivasi belt. The others are an old friend of him, Dāsmāt, the owner of the house, and another Adivasi belonging to the Khaṛiā community who is guest of Dāsmāt. Dāsmāt and the Khaṛiā talk in a mix of Bangla and Santali which is incomprehensible to the narrator. Dāsmāt explains that the Khaṛiā live mostly on the hills and in the jungles. They don’t practice much sedentary agriculture but cultivate a little bit the slopes of the hills and integrate that by working in winter in the houses of the Mundas, or as guards for their granaries. At the moment the main occupation of this man is wood cutting. He cuts wood in the jungle and then sells it in the market. In this way he barely earns enough to eat for the day. The reason of his visit is related to an accident occurred some days before. It appears that his father-in-law came to his house, stole 2,500 rupees from him and went away taking his daughter with him. Now he is going from village to village where he thinks that his father-in-law and wife might be. He believes that they might be in Dāsmāt’s village and wants him to convince his father-in-law to return him the money and his wife. The narrator gets interested in how he could have had such a sum of money in the house. The reason is that the Khaṛiā received 35,000 rupees as compensation from the government after a flock of elephants, moved by hunger, had burst into his village destroying his house and killing his first wife and two sons. He then left his money at a post office from where he got a passbook. The narrator asks the visitor to show him his passbook and, reading through it, he is astonished to find out how quickly the Khaṛiā man spent almost all his money. A sum was
used for the ceremony of his dead wife and children, another for building a house that ultimately fell down, yet another for buying goats that either escaped or were slaughtered and eaten by his own relatives, some money was lend to the chief of his village. The narrator argues that with such a sum of money one would buy some land, get an occupation and live happily but the Khariā replies that he does not need either cattle or land, all he needs is some wood to cut and sell at the market in order to buy some rice.

3.2.2.2 Analysis

The narrative framework of this story is based upon the encounter between the narrator and the Khariā. The function of Dāsmāt is not that of interpreter between the two, since even the Khariā knows Hindi, but rather that of a cultural intermediary. It is Dāsmāt that introduces the Khariā and his personal issues to the narrator. His house is the place where the Adivasi and the non-Adivasi meet and start talking to each other. Non-comprehension is an important element of their interaction. The narrator does not understand the language that the two speak with each other, a mixture of Bangla and Santali (bāngle miśrit santhālī). What is interesting is that he is curious about what they are saying “… I couldn’t understand anything. But I was eager to catch the conversation going on between the two (28)”.

34 The Khariā, whose name is never revealed, is introduced in the first lines of the narration as having a strong bed smell (tez-tīkhī durgandh) coming from his body and a mention is made about the scent of alcohol coming from his mouth. Nevertheless, the narrator shows a certain fascination for the Khariā and even empathy. Subsequently a detailed description is given:

He was a young man of 30-35 years. Weak body, tangled hair, dirty and almost teared cloths, but his face and his personality did not suggest humility or despair but rather cheerfulness (29-30).

35 It is interesting that despite his shabby aspect the Khariā man inspires a positive feeling in the narrator. The term praphullatā is central for the explanation of the fascination that the narrator feels. Perhaps he himself, while having a better health and clean and proper clothes lacks the cheerfulness of the Khariā. It can be argued that this passage reflects a kind of romanticized view of the Adivasi. The language used here is quite refined, the preponderance of Sanskrit tatzam such as krśakāy, dīntā, nairāśya and praphullatatā suggests an attempt of literary romanticism.

34 mere palle kuch par nahiṁ rahāthā. lekin un donoṁ mem hone wālī bātcit ko lekar mujhmeṁ utsuktā thi.
35 vah tīs-paintis varś kā yuvak thā. krśakāy sārīr, utjhe hue bāl, malin aur lagbhag tār-tār ho cuke vastr, lekin uske cehre yā pūre vyaktīt se dīntā yā nairāśya nahiṁ, balki ek tarah ki praphullatā hi raḥi thi.
There is a constant theme in the narration i.e. that of the impossibility of reciprocal understanding between the narrator and the Khariā. An impossibility that does not derive from language, since both speak Hindi, but from the culture. While Dāsmāt is an old friend and probably more acquainted with the dikū, the guest is of a different kind, a less ‘civilized’ Adivasi with whom the narrator struggles to find common values. In this story the cultural gap between the Adivasi and the dikū is represented by the approach to money. When the narrator asks the guest to show him the passbook they are interrupted by Dāsmāt who calls them to go bathing. Already there it is possible to see the nonchalance of the Khariā man towards his passbook kept in a dirty bag that he later leaves unattended while he goes bathing. However it is at the end of the story that he gives authentic proof of not caring much about money and market economy as a whole. In the last dialogue the narrator lists the expenses that the Khariā incurred, while the latter explains the purpose of the expenses. The narrator is astonished in respect of the carelessness of the Khariā man towards the goats that were lost and the new built house that immediately fell apart. It might be argued that the purchase of goats and a proper house\textsuperscript{36} represent attempts to conduct a more comfortable life. However, such attempts systematically fail due to the unconcern, or perhaps stoicism of the man.\textsuperscript{37} At last the narrator gets even angry learning that 5000 rupees were lend to the chief of the village and comments it with irony: “I flew into rage— You became a big moneylender (32)”.\textsuperscript{38} The irony of the comment comes from the fact that the moneylender is one of the most dreadful characters in relation to Adivasi. The moneylender often represents the monetary economy, the trickery and the abuses carried on against Adivasis. The Khariā’s last statements sets the end for a no-where-going discussion:

‘… I don’t need anything. No cattle, no land, no goats… Wood, I need wood. I will cut the wood, I will sell it at the bazar and I will live from water and rice’ (32).\textsuperscript{39}

The behavior of the Khariā is interpreted as foolishness by the dikū while the explanation might lie in the Khariā’s unfamiliarity with money, or with economic planning.

This story also alludes at the relation between the Adivasi and the government. The Khariā got his money as a compensation from the forest department (van vibhāg), which he calls ‘jangal kā sāhab’ (the master of the forest). The use of the term sāhab (master, owner)

\textsuperscript{36} The man specifies: ‘patthar kā ghar’ (stone house) in contrast to the simple hut where he used to live.

\textsuperscript{37} From the text it is hard to tell whether the Khariā follows some kind of religion or philosophy of life that impels him to behave in the manner he does.

\textsuperscript{38} krodh se bhunbhunāyā maṁ— bahut bārā mahājan bantā hai.

\textsuperscript{39} ‘… kuch nahin căhie. na gorū, na zamīn, na bakriyāṁ… kāṭh (jangal) căhie kāṭh. lakṛī kāṭemge, hāṭ meṁ becęnīgė aur pānī bhāṭ khāyemge...’
suggests a reference to a person, rather than to an institution. The Khariā is aware of the fact that there is someone ruling over the forest with whom he has to deal (due to his occupation as woodcutter) but the concept of governmental institution might be obscure for him. Moreover sāhab is normally used with respect or even deference.

The setting of the story is not specified but it is said that the Khariā was living in the thick jungle near Poṭkā, a locality of East-Singhbhum district. The narrated events are likely to take place in a village of the same district. There are some background elements that give evidence for a rural Adivasi village. The narrator tells about the small houses colored in red and green with paintings decorating the doors which is typical of Adivasi houses. There is mention of a family of blacksmiths engaged in the production of metal tools such as knifes and arrowheads with the auxiliary of a small coal oven. There is also mention of the river banks where people go to bath. There are two ghats, one for men and one for women. The narrator observes:

Women were bathing without fear. As if they were assured that nobody was gazing at them or even without caring about it. I looked up and thought that if such young girls were bathing openly bathing in a city then an assembly of people would gather there (30-31).

In other words, the narrator wants to point out the strong difference in gender relationships between mainstream society and Adivasi society. However, the narrative trope of the undisturbed Adivasi women also reveals, to some extent at least, a certain erotic fascination.

3.2.3 Bhaginī

3.2.3.1 Summary

Bhaginī is the story about a social worker who repeatedly visits an Adivasi village at the foothills of an unspecified mountain. There, he makes acquaintance with Soren, a woman working in a governmental business out of the village, and the daughter of his sister who is always referred to as Bhaginī i.e. sister or niece. Bhaginī wins the sympathy of the social worker and while being still a child she enjoys life playing and running half naked in the jungle. She is also busy with the household occupations and she often has to lead out the cattle in the mornings. At times she frequents the local school but as soon this ends she goes straight to the river to play with her friends. The social worker tries to fill up the gaps of the children, who barely can write and count, by teaching them in the evenings, even though with

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40 striyāṁ nirbhik bhāv se snān kartiṁ. is bāt ke prati āśvast ki koī unheṁ ghūrkar dekh nahīṁ rahā hai yā phir is bāt ke prati beparvāh rahatiṁ. māṁne utti nazār se unki taraf dekhā aur soc gayā ki śahar mēṁ is taraf koī yuvā stri khule mēṁ nahōye to vohāṁ majmā lag jāye.
scarce results. The major problem afflicting this Adivasi community is the fact that many people from outside have come and settled causing unbalances in the traditional social system.

Some years elapses and when the social worker, now a journalist, visits again the house of Soren he finds Bhaginī grown to a shy teenager. He asks Soren when Bhaginī is going to get married but the answer is that none has come for her hand yet. The journalist is puzzled and Soren has to explain that in their society boys don’t go asking for the hand of girls, rather is the girls that choose a boy. In addition there is no tradition of dowry in this community and the fact that many outsiders have come to live in the area, expecting dowry, has made marriages of Adivasi girls a quite difficult task.

Some years elapses again. The journalist visits the village a third time accompanied by his wife. They meet Soren at her working place which in the meantime has developed into a more professional office with some computers and clerks working at them. The area around the village has changed, the river flowing around has decreased, and at its edge a barrier has been raised in order to build a larger road. Part of the bamboo forest has been cleared out and on a slope a square has been made. There he sees Bhaginī, who now is a grown up, still unmarried woman. At night the journalist discusses about Bhaginī with his wife. It seems that she will not get married and this concerns him. His wife assures him that among Adivasi this is not uncommon and that she will live with her brothers helping in the house and therefore there is nothing to worry about. During the night they hear the cattle making noises and in the morning they find out that a sheep has given birth to a lamb. Seeing Bhaginī gently taking care of the lamb, the journalist is emotionally moved. Leaving the village he is still concerned about her situation.

3.2.3.2 Analysis

Two main themes characterize the whole narration, often overlapping each other: the impact that the settlement of foreigners (non-Adivasi) in the village has for the local population, and in particular the consequences for young girls that don’t get married due to their different customs (the community does not practice dowry), and the concerns of a social worker, the narrator of the story, for Bhaginī.

The social worker describes the situation in the Adivasi area as completely different from others that he has already seen in the Hindi division where there is a lot of feudal oppression (sāmantī utpīran). In the Adivasi belt the problems of mainstream Hindu society don’t exist:
Neither was the society there divided in castes, nor was feudalism oppression built-in in the society. The thing about those districts was different where outsiders had already settled down in high numbers. At times we thought about doing some constructive work as opening a school, and at other times we thought about unify people against the full corruption in the sub-department (35).  

Education is another problem lifted up by the narrator. However, his biggest concern is Bhaginī and the whole story deals with his apprehension and feelings towards her. The sympathy he feels for Bhaginī is already evident in the first encounter when she was a little child.

Her body was stretched as a tender bamboo twig. Her deep black eyes displayed rascality while on the lips a stubborn, blameless smile was reflected. But her charm would be impossible to understand without knowing all the environment (33).

The last sentence is interesting because it suggests that the sympathy is motivated and that Bhaginī has to be considered as part of the environment to be appreciated.

At the second encounter when she has become an adolescent the sympathy has evolved in pure fascination:

In the magic light of the lantern, from the red-edged sari reaching the knees, her shiny youth was overflowing. [...] Whenever Bhaginī crosses the view, she does it as a jungle’s blooming flower or even as an unrestrained swift river (36).

On the last encounter when Bhaginī is adult her beauty is less emphasized while it is reported how her attitude has changed: “She was taller and more slender than before. On her face shyness gave had given place to peacefulness and self-confidence (38)”. Whether the feelings of the narrator are to be better described as a paternal adoration or as an infatuation can be discussed. However, his constant concern for her marriage points rather to the first scenario. The issue of marriage is taken up twice. The first time at the second encounter when the narrator directly asks Soren. The brief discussion between the narrator and Soren might serve the purpose of letting the reader know what the new incomer’s impact has had on the

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41 na to vahāṁ samājī vargom mem bānta tha aur na sāmantī utpīran hi us samājī mem antarnihit thā. un ilākom kī bāt alaq thī jahām bāri sankhyā mem bāhirāqatoṁ kā praveś ho cūkā thā. ham kabhī skāl calane jaisa racnātmak kāṁ karne kī bāt sake, kabhī prakhaṇḍ kāryālay mem vyapt bhraṣṭācār ke khilāf logom ko golaṁ karne kī bāt.

42 bāṁs kī nājuk tahāni kī tarah tāni uskī kāyā. gahri kālī āmkhorrī memī sārkat aur horṁhoṁ par macaltī ek nirdeś muskuṁ. lekin bagair pūre pariveś ko jāne is sammohan ko samjha nāṁhī saktaṁ.

43 lāṭen kī jādūrī rośnī memī bhuṭom tak lāī kor sārī se uske snigdha tarunāī chalak par rāhī thī. [...] bhaginī jabe bhi āmkhorrī ke sāmnē gujartī to jangal memī khile phīl kī tarah yā phir uddām vegvāṭī nadi kī tarah...

44 vah pahle se lambī aur charhari dikh rāhī thī. cehre par sankoc kī jagah ek viśrāntī aur ātmavīśvās.
community. However, it also reveals that the narrator is not completely aware of this problematic.

Soren gravely said—‘You will not understand. In our society there is no custom that a bridegroom goes looking for a girl. The girl shall choose someone, or if someone likes her he might ask to marry her. Then the marriage will take place’.

‘This means, if a girl does not love someone, or if none come to ask her hand then she will remain unmarried?’

Soren answered with some bitterness—‘It may be. In our place there is no charge on the family of the girl. She has two good-for-labor hands. That’s why there is no dowry here, it is the bridegroom that has to pay a bride price. This is a different thing that now due to the influence of the dikū, here too boys have started to hope for dowry. Because of this the marriage of girls has started to become difficult’.

The cultural gap between the narrator’s world and that of the Adivasi is represented by the issue of marriage and Soren functions as a bridge between the two. She is closer to the world of the narrator and knows the differences between them, falling herself in between. In fact, despite the fact that she works outside the village in a governmental business she is not able to use a computer.

Along with that there are also some references to the environment, which can be interpreted in ecocritical terms. The noisy world and the consumerist society of the narrator is put in contrast with the relaxed, almost idyllic world of the Adivasi: “That consumerist society and culture we live in was so far away from Bhagini’s concerns… (33)”.

The setting is telling in this sense, Soren’s village is located on the foothills of some mountain very far away from the chaos of the cities. The description of the river in the proximity of the village is itself idyllic.

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45 The word kanyā-dhan is translated in McGregor’s Hindi-English Dictionary as ‘propriety belonging to a girl before her marriage (165)’ however the context leaves no doubt that here it is meant as ‘bride price’.

46 Soren ne usī gambhīrtā se kahā—‘tum nahiṁ samjhoge. hamāre samāj mein larkī ke lie var dhūnīhyne nikalne kā rivāj nahīṁ. larki kisi ko cun le, yā fir use koī pasand kar rīstā māṁgne āye. tabhī hotā hai vivāh.’

‘yānt, larkī ko kisi se prem na ho, yā koī uskā hāth māṁgnā na āye to larkī kumvārī rah jāye?’

Soren ne thoī tiktatā se tabā divā—‘aisā ho saktā hai. hamāre yahāṁ larkī parivār ke lie bojhai nahīṁ māṁ ni jāttī. vah to mehnatkaś do hāth hai. isīle hamāre yahāṁ dahej nahīṁ caltō, varpākō ko hī kanyādhan denā pāṛtā hai. yah alag bāt ki ab dikā sanskrīti ke prabhav se hamāre yahāṁ bhi dahej ki ummid larkēvāle karne lage hainī. is vajah se larkī ke vivāh menī kathināi hone lāgi hai.’

47 ham jis upabhoktāvādi samāj-sanskrīti ke bic jīte hainī, use bhginī kā dūr-dūr tak koī vāstā nahīṁ...
Outside the village, a river flows stretching out as a garland on a neck. In its water the reflections of untidy black, dark green thick trees standing on the banks kept swaying (33).

At the third visit, after a time gap of 20-25 years, the narrator notices how the environment has changed.

The water in the river had sank and contained at the banks as a broad road had been built. The jungle on the side of the river was less thick and on the slope a square had appeared (37).

However, Soren’s house hasn’t changed at all. From this one can infer that changes come only from the outside world, and not from within the Adivasi community. Perhaps the expansion due to the new settlers has required an improvement of the road leading to the village while the level of water in the river might have sank due to agricultural expansion.

The thought of Bhaginī being unmarried still afflicts him. This is understandable since in mainstream Hindi society an unmarried woman is a burden for the family, particularly for the father, whose honor demands to arrange a marriage for her. However, even the wife at this point explains to him that for an Adivasi this is not equally bad and she attributes that to a more gender-equal society. She argues:

In Adivasi society there is more equality in the relation between woman and man. And the first condition of woman’s freedom is that she can live a life without a man. Bhaginī is paying the price of that equality (38).

It is impossible to not see a glimpse of sarcasm in the last comment. It might communicate that the wife’s position about this issue is that after all the marriage-oriented Hindi society is anyway better, at least in practical terms, than the Adivasi freedom.

At last the narrator is still not convinced and thinking about the decreased level of the river he finds consolation in the fact that with the monsoon it will grow again and overflow from the barriers but for Bhaginī there seems to not be any solution (39).

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48 gāṁv ke bāhar gale ke hār ki tarah bahtī ek naddī, jīske pānī meṁ dolti rahtī hai kināre par betartī khare kāle, gahre hare ghane perom ki parchāyam.
49 naddī meṁ pānī qhaṭ gayā thā aur kināre se use bāṁndhkar caurā rāstā banā diyā gayā thā. naddī ke us pār, bāṁ ke jangal ki saghntā kām ho gayī thī aur ek samatal maiddān nikāl āyā thā.
50 ‘ādivāstī samājī meṁ aurat-mard meṁ samāntā aur barābarī kā riśtā hai. aur aurat kī ajādi kī pahlī sart yah hai ki vah puruś ke bagair jivan-yāpan kar sake. bhaginī usī barābarī kī kīmat cukā rahi hai. […]’.
51 dilāsē ki bāṭ yah thī mansūn meṁ vah phir labālab bhar jāegī aur bāndh ko tōr bāh nikalegī. lekin hamārī bhaginī.
3.2.4 *Ham bhī hindū*

3.2.4.1 Summary

*Ham bhī hindū* is about a man who lives and works in a neighborhood bordering with a leper colony. The man feels compassion and aversion at the same time for these people, and even though he believes that assisting them is the highest kind of service, he fully avoids any contact with them. He is not at all concerned if the diseased are Hindus, Muslims, Sikh or Christians but rather he regards them as forming a separate group beyond the traditional religious communities. The day of Ram Navami demonstrations take place in the city and these are followed by tumults and violence. In the evening the loudspeakers announce a curfew so that the narrator and a friend of him cannot leave the house where he lives. Here the two discuss about the conflict going on between Muslims and Hindus with the friend arguing that after partition Muslims should have moved to Pakistan while the host believes that these are all political games, hardly representable in the real world. After two or three days the situation gets a little bit more relaxed. Going out the narrator meets a group of lepers shouting Hindu religious slogans. One of them approaches him and the two start talking to each other. The diseased man tells about how he, one day, got signs of leprosy on his hand and in consequence of that he was set aside by his friends and also by his family. Therefore he left his house and found shelter in this quarter where he has lived ever since. His interlocutor feels empathy for him and also anger towards the religion that permits such a shame. One week later the curfew becomes less strict and he can go to market. He is shocked noting how a lot of people are gathered there and are apparently careless about the atrocities going on in the city, discernible even from there. He heads back to his neighborhood and it is already dark when he gets there. All around it is silent but suddenly some shouts come from not too far away. He imagines that this might be the Muslim rioters coming to assault the quarter and therefore he rushes to his home where he tells everything to his friend. The two decide to go out and see what is going on. Once in the street they come across a group of lepers. He asks them if rioters are on the way to enter the quarter but they answer that Muslims are no longer coming since they killed them. He cannot but face the fact that even the lepers, who have been completely ostracized by the Hindu community, believe in and are ready to fight for Hindutva. After all they are also Hindus.

3.2.4.2 Analysis

In this story the author engages with two major issues. At one side there is the marginalization and social stigma attached to leprosy afflicted people and at the other the
communalism between Hindus and Muslims. The two issues are intertwined, since the lepers themselves ascribe to Hindu identity and they even fight against the Muslims, killing a group of rioters. The lepers represent the ‘other’ for the narrator. However, in this case the narrator has no interest nor curiosity for the ‘other’ which used to be the case in the previous stories. In fact he feels aversion towards the lepers. Nevertheless, he also feels compassion for them and admires those who work for them.

I, and my friends in a similar way, had aversion for them. The other’s opinion and my own opinion about myself was that I am a noble minded person. I had compassion for deprived people. I have always believed that doing service for leprosy affected people was the highest form of service, but the reality was that only thinking about living in a quarter closed to them raised aversion in me (40).

This passage reveals the double moral of the character, who feels compassion and aversion at the same time. He cannot afford to live in another place due to the rent’s prices and this is the only reason that keeps him there exposing him to the view of the leper colony which he calls an infernal torture (nārakī yātnā).

Until the day when communal violence explodes in the city the narrator has no knowledge and gives no importance to the religion of the diseased people. However, after the riots this becomes a central point. The issue on the Hindu-Muslim conflict is first taken up with his friend who has quite extreme ideas. It is in the conversation with one of the lepers that he learns that they are also Hindus. Sharing the same religion makes them somewhat less different. Talking with one of them he learns about the discrimination suffered even inside his family and asks if he is not angry at his parents. It appears that the young man is not angry at them because he believes that the disease is the result of his past life’s actions.

‘Why get angry? This is the fruit of my past birth’s actions. What’s the guilt of my parents? … well, would you let some leprosy afflicted person live in your house?’

I did not have an answer to this question. Yes, I obviously felt compassion for them and I did feel anger at Hindu religion that made them so fatalist (43).

\[52\] *ham aur hamāre sāthiyōm ko sāmān rāp se unse ghṛnā thī. mere bāre mēm dāsrot kī aur khud merī rāy yah thī kī māiṁ udārmanā hūṁ. vaṁcit jāmāt ke lie prati mere man mēṁ sahānumbhūṁi hai. kuṣṭ rogīyōm kī sevā karnā mānvātā kī sabse bārt seva thī mere hisāb se, lekin hākikat yah kī un logōṁ ke karb ke kvārtar mēṁ rahne kī bāt sockar hī mērā mān ghrnā se bhar thā.*

\[53\] *hamēṁ is bāt kī kabhī jiśīsā nahīṁ hui kī us bastī mēṁ rahne vāle kuṣṭ rogi hindā hainṁ yā musalmaṁ, sikh yā īsāī (41). (I had no curiosity to know whether the lepers living in those slums were Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or Christians.)*

\[54\] ‘gussā kyōṁ āyegā? yah to hamāre pichle jannm ke karmōṁ kā phal hai. māṭā-pītā kā kyā kasūṁ? … acchā āp apne ghar mēṁ kisi kuṣṭ rogi ko rahne dijīyegā?’
It is interesting that even though the narrator feels compassion, and condemns the parents for having discriminated their son, at the same time he realizes that he himself is not different. The Hindu values relate them and put them on the same level. The conversation radically changes the attitude of the narrator towards the lepers, and even if he still feels aversion he sees that the circumstances are such that he is forced to maintain a relation with them and this is concretized in the fact that he accepts vegetables from them.

The criticism is later on directed towards the society in general. The scene at the market is very telling. The gay noises and the colored view of the bazar are in sharp contrast with the atrocities all around. Explosions are heard coming from not too far away, people are being killed, a bus of school girls was set on fire without anybody going to help, and while the smell of burnt bodies is still perceptible in the air men are laughing and women are fully engaged shopping while boys and girls are drinking soft-drinks.

At the end the killing of the Muslim rioters by the hand of the lepers completely breaks the opposition between the narrator and the lepers puzzling the former who looking first at his friend and later at the lepers remains speechless:

Left speechless, I looked at my friend first. Then at the people staying in front of me. They had the appearance of cursed ghosts… (45)

It is interesting to observe that the formation of the identity of the lepers, integrating both elements of ‘being a leper’ and ‘being Hindu’ creates different kind of contrast when measured with the ‘non-Hindus’ i.e. the Muslims, and the ‘non-lepers’ i.e. the main character. Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) emphasizes the so called framing distinctions which shapes “a representation of “me” in contrast to others (Pehrson and Reicher, 2014: 100)”.

Although both identity elements (‘being a leper’ and ‘being Hindu’) work as group-level self-categorization the output of such self-categorizations are very different as the different attitudes towards the ‘non-lepers Hindus’ and the ‘non-Hindus’ demonstrate.

3.2.5 Cāṇḍni rātem

3.2.5.1 Summary

In a night brightened by the light of the moon a young man called Bhoglā Soren is upset. He feels that his wife is concerned and he is afraid that she might love someone else. She...
suffered a big loss when her father, a worker for the Forest Department, died hit by a tree. After the accident *Saloni* (that’s her name) who used to be a cheerful girl fell into depression but at the same time developed a stronger bound with her mother and they kept on living together supporting each other. One day *Bhoglā* sees her at the edge of the forest carrying some wood on her head. She stops to wipe away the sweat from her neck. The view of her makes *Bhoglā* fall in love and *Saloni* noting that the young man is gazing at her, smiles back. *Bhoglā* returns to his village and tell his mother that he wants to marry her. After some discussion she agrees. *Bhoglā* and *Saloni* belong to two different villages, 20 km apart from each other, and two different communities. *Saloni* is a *Santhālī* girl while *Bhoglā* is a *Khariyā*. However, the two get married and *Saloni* moves to his village where she is given food, new clothes and ornaments. Still, she is unhappy. *Bhoglā* struggles with the thought of her possibly being in love with someone else. This keeps him awake at nights and one night of full moon he decides to discover once for all why *Saloni* is being unfriendly with him. He shakes her awake from sleep and asks her why she behaves in that way and whether she longs for someone else. He then goes out on the veranda and stands in front of the moon. *Saloni* goes up and follows him. When she gets close to him she touches his back and tells him that she loves none else but him but that she misses her mother who now is alone and poor, and that she is concerned for her. The story ends with *Bhoglā* answering that the day after they will both go to visit her mother.

3.2.5.2 Analysis

The story describes the relation between husband and wife. Both of them are Adivasi, but they belong to different communities. It might be argued that, here, the ‘otherness’ is not represented by an Adivasi in relation to a *dikā* but it is both Adivasi being the ‘other’ of one another. The distance between the two villages where *Bhoglā* and *Saloni* belong to entail an important cultural distance as they represent different communities i.e. the *Khariyā*, inhabiting the mountains, and the *Santhāl*, occupying the lowlands. The names of the villages are not specified but at a certain point a mention is made about the market in *Kālikāpur* which suggests that the setting must be not far away from it.

The intermarriage between different Adivasi communities is not referred to as problematic. When *Bhoglā*’s mother initially does not approve the marriage the reason is simply that she wants her son to go on studying. Later on it is her who goes to talk with *Saloni*’s mother. The meeting is interesting and it tells something about how such issues are carried on.
‘She saw him. They have already met. She likes him’

What should Saloni say? There was no reason to not like Bhoglā. Instead of giving an answer her face turned red. Saloni’s mother understood her feeling and the marriage of Saloni to Bhoglā was settled (49). The fact that Saloni’s mother looks at her suggests that the decision falls on Saloni only but the sentence “What should Saloni say? There was no reason to not like Bhoglā” might indicate that her agreement on marry him relays on a pragmatic decision rather than on sentiments. However, there is a moment where Bhoglā wonders whether marrying her might have caused some crime or sin (aparādh).

The figure of Saloni is not much different from the other female characters of the previous stories. She is described in first place as a hardworking and beautiful woman, all days busy in the household chores, never getting tired and always looking fresh:

Despite being busy in the household works all day she didn’t get tired. She was always fresh as a jungle flower (47).

This simile with the jungle flower is a first glimpse of a romanticized description of Saloni. However, it is at the first meeting with Bhoglā that she is represented in a fully romanticized way.

In the fire of the setting sun all her body was shining as copper. All around her cheeks and navel drops of sweat were sparkling as diamonds. She stopped at one place and helping herself with a tree trunk to support the load, she wiped away the sweat from her neck with the edge of her sari (49).

The sensual image of the Adivasi girl lets transpire a quite palpable erotic fascination of the narrator. Here again then, the perspective of the narrator is that of the outsider enchanted by the wild beauty of the exotic female character. Later on follows an interesting particular. When Saloni notices that Bhoglā is looking at her she smiles back without timidity “niḥsaṅkoc haṁs dī (49)”. This detail also reveals the author’s perception of the Adivasi woman who is different from the Hindu woman inasmuch she does not feel that kind of embarrassment that the gaze of a boy would provoke on a mainstream Hindu girl.

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56 ‘use kyā dekhtī hai. Vah bhoglā se mil cukī hai. use pasand karti’

57 din-bhar ghar ke kāṁ-kāj meṁ vyast rahne ke bhāovajūd vah thakaṭī nahiṁ thī. har vakt tarotājā, kisī janglī phūl kī tarah

58 She was bearing a load of wood on her head.

59 ḍhalate sūraj kī āmic meṁ uskā pūrā badan tāmbe sā camak rahā thā. kapol aur nābhi ke ird-gird pasine kī būndem hīre jaise jhīmīlā. ek jagaḥ ruk sar ke bojh ko ek darakht ke tane se tikākar vah āṁcal se apne gale kā pasīnā porchnē lagī.
The character of Bhoglá is described in less details than that of Saloní. The only remark on him is that he is the only boy of his village who studies in a college in the city. He is an educated and good-looking young man. If one would like to dare a further interpretation it could be suggested that Bhoglá represents the alter ego of the narrator who is attracted and longs for the Adivasi girl, Saloní in this case.

Along with the romanticized elements of the story there also are elements of romance in a more straight sense. The whole story is about the love of Bhoglá for Saloní and his struggle with the thought of her possibly being in love with someone else.

The light of the moon is a recurrent element of the story. In the very first lines it is said how the rise moon changes the atmosphere:

> It was a frightening night. On three sides standing mountains. From the shelter of the opposite mountain the rising of the moon in the sky transformed the village into a magic world (46).

The moon seems to play an important role. It is in the moonlight nights that Saloní takes her mother to the open space of the village (akhar) where man and women sing together, the most significant space for the enactment of Adivasi identity. The moonlight exercises a particular power on Saloní. The conclusion of the story is also accompanied by the moonlight (bharpūr cāṃdāṁ). It is hard to say whether the moon shall have a deeper significance perhaps related to the beliefs of the Adivasi. This possibility is not completely justified in the story and it might be that its presence has rather a decorative function.

3.2.6 Bhūrī āṅkheñ

3.2.6.1 Summary

The arrival of a new co-worker challenges the position of an honest newsman who now faces the rough reality of most newsrooms. This newsman has the peculiarity of being superstitious, and in particular he has a dislike for people with brown eyes. He feels that such people are dishonest and dangerous. He has also the feeling that the color of his editor’s eyes changes depending on the situation. Moreover, he finds that the change of color in his eyes is followed by different and contradictory positions to some sensitive issues. For instance, when speaking to the outside he would talk showing solidarity for the Third World while with his

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60 Bhoglá paṛha-likhō sudarśan yuvak thā (49).
61 bhīṣāṇ cāṃdāṁ rāt. tīn or khaṛe pahār. sāmne khaṛe pahār kī oṭ se cāṃd ke ākāś merṁ utarte hī vah gāṁv ek māyāvī duniyā merṁ badal gayā.
62 unke udās jīvan merṁ cāṃdāṁ rātṁ kā viśeṣ mahatv hotā hai (48).
collaborators he would talk about the ‘survival of the fittest’. Similarly, he would stand as the protector of Dalit, Adivasi and women even though none from these categories work at the newsroom.

The new arrived has brown eyes and therefore he immediately feels that he cannot trust him. Even though the co-worker demonstrates to be a hard-working man, the journalist soon realizes that the articles he writes are biased and clearly one-sided. He takes upon himself the duty of correcting the articles until he decides to report the issue to the editor. However it becomes clear that the editor not only approves that kind of articles but slowly relives the journalist from his duties giving them to the new arrived that meanwhile has gained his sympathy. It is mentioned that much of the incomes of a newspaper comes from the advertisement it contains and that newspapers are often ready to accommodate their articles in order to not disappoint local politicians, bankers and even the mafia in order to obtain advertisements from them. One day the launch of a new newspaper causes tensions among the various publishing houses. The editor gives a speech where he says that these are hard times and they need to work hard to keep high the dignity of the newspaper. The speech deeply inspires the journalist who is ready to do his best for the dignity of the newspaper. He writes a letter with suggestions and delivers it to the editor who does not seem to care much about it. Later he writes a list where he codifies the manner of conduct for all employees and hangs it at his office door giving rise to the hilarity of his co-workers. One week later the editor calls him and it becomes evident that the concern of the editor is to increase the number of copies and the circulation rather than the quality. The final strike arrives when the editor suddenly decides to give the new arrived all the responsibility concerning news, publicity and circulation while he will only take care of particular news. In that moment he has the impression that the eyes of the editor have turned brown.

3.2.6.2 Analysis

This is the only story in the collection that doesn’t deal with Adivasi, or at least not directly. The narration revolves around the aversion of the main fictional character for people with brown eyes. He admits from the very beginning to be an offer of superstition (andhaviśvās). The origin of this particular superstition is explained by the character:
People with fair skin and brown or blue eyes exploited the people of dark skin and black eyes of the world (51). Thus the character’s superstition carries also a shade of post-colonialism to which he adds a biological explanation stating that all predators have brown eyes. Then the sentiment of aversion for the new coworker is immediate and it appears later on to be well-founded. The behavior of the new arrived is apparently exemplary. He is hardworking and obsequious, even submissive towards his superior but still the newsman feels he can’t trust him:

Even though he would always speak with submissiveness to me, due to the prejudice and superstition against brown eyes I have always avoided him (53).

When he first arrives at the office he is even asking for the superior’s blessing and says that he has already talked with the editor. The newsman can’t believe. He speculates over the fact that belonging to the same caste of the editor might have helped him getting the position. The newsroom proves to be a very discriminatory place and in fact the ongoing corruption and discrimination is the central element of this story. Thus, the struggles of the newsman concerned with the quality of the newspaper against the new intruder and eventually the editor himself whose only interest is increasing the number and the circulation, becomes a critique to the world of journalism. The journalist laments a corrupt state of things, where in order to get publicity, upon which the very existence of the newspapers often relays, editors are ready to publish biased news. The newsman points the finger to editors who nowadays act less as editors and more as managers. Part of the problem is also that editors and managers do not pay enough the journalists:

Basically the responsible are the editors and the managers who don’t give them enough remuneration so that they can live life with self-respect (54).

The competition among different newspapers is also an occasion for unfairness. When the new newspaper is launched in the capital the journalist tells about a ‘healthy competition’ (‘svasth pratiyogita’) where journalists go around throwing and tearing each other posters while hawkers beat one another.

63 Gorī camṛi aur bhūri-nilī āmkkhom vāle logom ne duniyā ke śyām rang aur kāli āmkkhom vāle logom kā śoṣaṇ kījā hai.
64 hālāṅki vah muhīse homesā vinmartā se hī bāt karte, lekin bhūri āmkkhom ke prati apne pūrvvāgrah aur andhviśās ki vajah se maiṁ homesā unse katrākar nikal jātā.
65 lekin ve bhī usī jāti-birādārī ke thē jiske hamāre sampādak, isliye lagā ki ve sahī bhī ho sakta hain (53).
66 ab ke sampādak sampādak kam aur akhbār ke prabandhak adhik huā karte hain (52).
67 zimmedār to mūlata: akhbārom ke sampādak aur prabandhak hainī jo unhem pārisamik ke rūp merī itnī rāśi nahiṁ dete ki ve ātmasamān ke sāth jīvan basar kar saken.
Even though this story does not directly deal with Adivasi, they are still there in the background. A first mention is made when the journalist mentions the contradictory behavior of the editor regarding Dalit, Adivasi and women, even causing a change of color in his eyes. Later on the relation between newspapers and the Adivasi becomes more evident.

After that many Adivasi got extremely backward lands in the form of a separate state, the abundance of mineral resources and coal turned the Corporate Jagat in a follower of this state. The presence of big industrialists as the Jindal, the Mittal and the Bhushan increased. Along with that followed a crowd of different newspapers. From the capital newspapers were coming, and their edition as well as small and big newspapers were coming also from the small cities. [...] Their gaze was on the governmental advertisement, and they hoped a lot in the Corporate Jagat too. But the big thing was that they were themselves a part of some corporation and they protected the commercial interests of their owners. Some newspapers belonged directly to important industrial families as Birlā and Goyankā. Many newspapers from Koyalāṅcal, the ‘coal-mining paradise’, were launched by the iron mafia (53).

In this story the exploitation of the mineral resources present in the soil of the lands inhabited by the Adivasi is depicted from far away. Its presence is intertwined with the misconduct of the newspapers which either seek the favor of companies and mafia or are even owned by them. The story looks on the issues of the Adivasi from a broader perspective, giving a glimpse of the many intricacies and interest based relations that challenges the Adivasi world.

3.2.7 Karkī
3.2.7.1 Summary

In a dark and humid night where clouds are gathering in the sky and the wind is blowing a man is observing the gloomy view from his house. At the light of the street lamps the creepers look like spider nets. It is a frightening atmosphere. In front of the house there is a high road and at the other side trees, a small creek and an Adivasi hut. On the threshold of the hut a woman is standing. The man is concerned about her, it is one of those nights when everything bad might happen, and if something would happen to her who could give help? After the construction of the road the people living in that area went away and big houses
were built while all huts that used to be there disappeared, except for that one. The woman is called Karkī. She is described as being of dark complexion, very beautiful and hardworking while her husband appears to be quite weak and not as hardworking as his wife. They have two kids. They make their living by cultivating some land out of the hut and selling cups of cooked rice. She spends her days cutting wood, washing clothes and cultivating vegetables and fruits. The neighbor living at the other side of the road has some sporadic contact with them. Once, when he had just moved there with his wife and son he even offered her to work at his house but she refused. One day Karkī comes to him with a load of eggplants for which she is not demanding any money. He is confused by this action and incapable of understanding the reason of such a gift, he accepts the eggplants. Later on something occurs at Karkī’s house and the neighbor notices that she and her husband have started drinking. He wants to investigate but he is unsure whether he should go to their place or not. At the end he doesn’t dare but instead he calls Karkī’s husband and has a discussion with him. He asks him what is the matter with them to which the Adivasi replies “You are from Jharkhand… we are also from Jharkhand (65)”69. The neighbor doesn’t really understand what the Adivasi man means with that but he feels that at least this creates a feeling of intimacy. The two go on talking and it appears that the forefathers of the Adivasi man came from Jharkhand long ago and settled there, cleaning the forest and cultivating the land. All around there was only jungle and plenty of water. Then the high road was built and the water decreased. Moneylenders came and bought the land promising to provide a water pump for their house, which was unnecessary since they already had a well. The day after the man sees the Adivasi couple again and this time Karkī’s husband says that he has beaten her. Astonished, the neighbor rebukes him. Karkī’s husband explains that she is missing home and dreams about it even if her home does not exist anymore. The neighbor gives him parched grain and apples which Karkī’s husband accepts. After all they are both from Jharkhand. The story ends with Karkī, her husband and the child standing in the courtyard. The neighbor is still observing them concerned about Karkī.

3.2.7.2 Analysis

This story puts much attention on the divide between the world of the Adivasi and that of the non-Adivasi. The setting of the story is a city of Odisha on the banks of the Baitarnī River. It is specified that the exact location is a quarter of non-Adivasi (gair-ādivāsī). The co-existence of non-Adivasi and Adivasi (limited to Karkī’s hut) in the same area makes

69  ‘āp jhārkhand ke haiṁ na... ham bhi jhārkhandi...’
interactions possible but at the same time it is limited. The limitation has here the concrete shape of a high road that separates the house of the narrator from Karkī’s hut. However an even greater boundary is the cultural and psychological one. In fact the high road does not form an impediment for crossing from one side to the other but still the non-Adivasi is refrained from going to the other side. When the non-Adivasi neighbor speculates about the fact that if something bad happened to Karkī none could help her, he automatically excludes the possibility of himself going there. Similarly when he tells his preoccupations to his wife she taunts him at first: “Then go, wake them up” for later assuring him that “Nothing will happen. And if it will happen what can you do? (61)”. This becomes even more evident when he decides to investigate what is happening at the other side and sends his son to buy some food to give them. As the son returns with some parched grain and apples he is left alone with the dilemma about how to deliver the goods:

The son said— ‘now think, how you are going to give them all this. How will you do?’ And he went to his room. I reflected for a while, then standing on the threshold of my house in front of their hut I called.

‘bābū... bābū... stand up… listen’ (65)71

At the end he will never dare to cross the limit. Reversey this does not seem to be a matter of big concern for the Adivasi couple who both go at the other side in at least one occasion. Thus the problem is entirely confined to the non-Adivasi. The reason laying behind is perhaps related to the social Hindu religion norms about cleanness, even though having her as cleaning woman would still be acceptable. This much is sufficient to reveal the contrast between the different cultures that the two families belong to. At one side the non-Adivasi, restrained by complex mainstream society social norms and at the other side the Adivasi who being outside the Hindu society don’t need to care about its rules. This does not mean that they do not follow norms at all or that they don’t have any values. In fact Karkī refuses what probably is a more remunerative job (cleaning woman) than selling cups of rice for few rupees. Perhaps she considers cleaning as an offensive job.

Karkī is the central figure of this story. There is no doubt that the neighbor is attracted by her. She is described as a beautiful woman whose dark complexion does not affect her beauty:

70 ‘to jāo. un logoṁ to jagāo’ ‘aisa kuch nahṁ hogā bhi to tum kar kyā sakoge?’
71 beṁe ne kohā— ‘ab āp jāniye, kaise unheṁ yah sab deṅge. kyā karenge.’ aer vah kamre ke bhītar calā gayā. maiṁ kuch der tak vicārātā rahā, phir uske jhopṛī ke sārne apne ghar ki dahilīz par khare hokar āvāţ āi. ‘bābū... bābū... utho... suno...’
The color of her skin did not have any impact on her beauty. Fair is not synonym of beautiful, the same way as black is not a synonym for ugly. Karkī was black, but full of charm. Mother of two kids. But her body, bathing in the sweat of hard work, was perfectly shaped (62). It is worth noting the elegance of expression used in these few lines. The word for ‘charm’ lāvanya a Sanskrit tatsam – i.e. a loanword and a rather literary register of Hindi – and the sentence about her perfectly shaped body bathing in sweat evoke an eroticized image. In addition she is also hard working, and her being beautiful and laborious is put in contrast with her husband: “bābū, wearing paint and shirt really looked like a clerk while Karkī in a wide sari shined as a queen (63)”. The neighbor observes that her husband, probably due to his weak body, doesn’t do any of the works that normally would be done by men as for example cutting wood. Therefore it is Karkī who does most works. It might be argued that the overall negative opinion of the neighbor for Karkī’s husband relays on enviousness. He desires Karkī and can’t stand the fact that she belongs to someone else. The frustration is thus reversed on her husband. It has to be added that the feeling of the neighbor is not merely physical attraction, at several points, especially in introduction, it is evident that he is really concerned about her. Later on he is preoccupied when he sees that she started drinking and at the end when he has learnt about her nightmares and that her husband beats her he is still in apprehension and at the same time enchanted by her: “And Karkī? There she is with her innate mildness of a queen (67)”. Thus, the sympathy/empathy/compassion entailed in the concept of sahānubhūti is in this short story particularly evident.

On the background of the events there still is a story of exploitation. The dialogues between the neighbor and Karkī’s husband tell how that land used to belong to the Adivasi who first came from Jharkhand and settled there. In fact the Adivasi man still thinks that the land upon which his neighbor house lies belongs to him: “the house where you live is on our land (65-66)”. The two have a disagreement on this issue even if the neighbor decides to not argue. The disagreement reflects different ways of conceive propriety which in this case collide on each other. For the Adivasi man the right on the land comes from a first-come, first-served basis. However, after the building of the road the traders came and bought the land from the Adivasi.

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72 unke saundarya-bodh merē cāmṛī kā raṅg koi khōś ahmiyat nāhiṁ rakhtā, saundarya kā paryāy nāhiṁ gorā aur ust tarah kālā raṅg asundar nāhiṁ. vāse bhī, karkī kālī to thī, lekin īvānī se bhāri. do bacchōnī kī māṁ. lekin sāṁce merē dhalā uskā ādān, jo śram karte vakt paśīne se nahā jātā.

73 bābū paīṁ-saṁt merē bikul bābū hī lagtā aur karkī caure pār kī sārī merē camak utthī kīrānī kī tarah.

74 aur karkī? vohī sahaj, saumy rājānī kī tarah.

75 ‘tum jiś ghar merē rahtō, vah zamīn hāmārī’.
‘Then how did the traders build this house?’

‘…They built it. After the construction of the road they came one day. They said “what will you do with all this land? Sell it. I will give money” I sold it. Then one day they brought the block office76. Then they built this house […]’. (66)77

This passage suggests that the Adivasi man might not be completely aware of the meaning of the commercial transaction he was involved in. In light of this, one can also imagine that the deal he made with the trader wasn’t necessarily a good deal. This is evident also from his economic situation. Even if the broken Hindi of Karki’s husband does not indicate that the traders were dishonest (since he probably wasn’t aware of being cheated) it is still possible to assume it from the way the narrator (i.e. the neighbor) expressed it: “After the construction of the road the local population disappeared together with their huts. The traders put their hands on the land (61)”78. By this statement it is clear that the trade with the Adivasi certainly wasn’t fair or that, anyway, it would have been difficult to oppose.

Despite the fact that the neighbor is mainly interested in Karki the conversations are always between him and her husband. Even when Karki brings the eggplants to his house there is no real exchange of words between the two: “She left the eggplants at the open door in front of the kitchen. Without saying or asking anything (64)”79. This creates a moment of confusion in the neighbor letting transpiring the cultural gap between the two. It might be argued that this scene wants to say something about the approach of the Adivasi to propriety and goods. This doesn’t necessarily mean that Karki’s action comes out of pure generosity, in fact it wouldn’t make much sense, but rather it might suggest a way as any to not waste a small and maybe unexpected surplus of vegetables. However, in the eyes of the neighbor, born out of a capitalist milieu, the most natural solution would be to sell the surplus to obtain an extra income. Even in the case of using it as a present would require a solid reason which here seems to lack completely.

The cultural gap is also visible from the language of the dialogues. While the narrator has a full control over his Hindi the same cannot be said for Karki’s husband who tends to put together few words at time in order to convey what he feels, rather than constructing proper

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76 A ‘block’ is an administrative unite found mainly in rural areas. Then ‘Block Office’ refers to the administrative office pertaining th the block.

77 ‘phir bāzār ke seth ne kaise yah makān banā liyā…?’

‘…banā liyā. sarak banne ke bād āyā ek din. bolā kyā karegā itnī jāmīn. bec de. paisā dāṅgā. bec di. le gāyā blāk āfīs ek din. fir yah makān banā liyā […]’

78 sarak banne ke bād sthānīy ābādī yahāṁ se vilopit ho gayī apnī jhopriyōṁ ke sāth. bāzār ke seth ne zamin hathiyā li.

79 … bairīgān lekar mere rasoī ghar ke sāmne, khulte darvāje par rakh diyā. binā mujhse kuch kahe, pūče.
sentences. This is particularly evident when he tells about the coming of his ancestors. At the question of the neighbor “how did you come here? (65)” he replies:

‘We didn’t come... our ancestors... the white man... railway line... the railway line running on the cultivators’ land... they came here in search of daily bread. You are from Jharkhand... we too (65)’. It is obvious that Hindi is not his mother tongue. However, even if his Hindi is a little bit rough the explanation is quite clear. His ancestors were forced to move from Jharkhand as the British took their lands and ultimately, following the construction of the rail lines, they ended up in Odisha were at that time there still was only jungle. It is interesting that beside the distance between the two, which is obvious at many levels, the language, the background, the economic situation and of course the ethnicity, the Adivasi man tries to stress the common Jharkhandī roots. When in another instance the neighbor asks him what is going on, after he saw them drinking, the answer “You are from Jharkhand... we are also from Jharkhand” seems to be intended as being self-explanatory, as if the fact of being from Jharkhand would itself explain his behavior. Unfortunately the neighbor does not understand but nevertheless he appreciates the effort made to create some intimacy between the two.

3.2.8 Ek thī Enī

3.2.8.1 Summary

Enī is an Oraon Adivasi girl who got entangled in a marriage with Nīmū, a non-Adivasi man that seduced her and got her pregnant. She is employed as a teacher in the school of a steel company plant as well as Nīmū, who dreams of becoming a famous painter. It was with the excuse of making a paint of her that Nīmū took Enī at his house and they started having an affair. As the rumors about Enī’s pregnancy starts spreading in the school, they are advised by the director to get married. Nīmū is reluctant at the idea demonstrating that he isn’t really in love with her. Eventually they get married and Enī gives birth to a child. However, it is an unhappy marriage with Nīmū constantly abusing and offending her. Enī gets indifferent at him and silently tolerates the abuses ‘dying’ inside a little bit more after every time that he mistreats her. By time he gets crueler. He doesn’t allow her to go to her village and when their parents comes for a visit he admonishes them that if they come back he will beat and throw their daughter in the street. He even instructs a riksha driver to take her everyday straight back and forth from the school. The time she is not at school she spends it as a

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80 The Hindi of the original is ‘ham nahiṁ āyā’ which is grammatically incorrect. It should be āe.
81 ‘ham nahiṁ āyā... hamārā purakhā... gorā sahib... relve lāin... khetihar jamin par dauṛi relve lāin... rojī-rotī kī talāś menī idhar ā gaye. āp jhārkhnāī... ham bhī...’
recluse, at home. After a while she starts to get sick and finally after visiting the doctor she finds out that she has tuberculosis. Even though her life is not in danger she has to be hospitalized. She stays in a free sanitarium ran by Mother Teresa’s nuns since she can’t stay either at home where she might infect her child, or at the company’s hospital from where she is denied acceptance. She remains there several months regularly taking medicines against T.B. and teaching other patients to read and write. Nīmū comes seldom to visit her and when he does so he doesn’t allow her to approach their son believing that even by touching he could be infected. She recovers and Nīmū comes to take her. He finds her in her room, silent, thinking about her home in the mountains.

3.2.8.2 Analysis

This story takes up the issue of intermarriage. The two characters are opposed to each other and incarnate opposed qualities. Enī, is beautiful and smart. Despite being Adivasi she managed to study and become a teacher. When Nīmū sees her for the first time he is instantly attracted by her figure. Thus, it is possible to see here the recurrent element of attraction of a non-Adivasi for the Adivasi. Enī is also kind and helps other patients teaching them to read and write. Reversely, Nīmū seems to be quite selfish. He does not care much about the teaching, his only concern is to become a famous artist. Yet, it is unclear whether he really has artistic skills or not. Evidently he is proud of his own drawings since they hang everywhere in their house. At first, his attraction for Enī seems to be love, in fact when the two are at his home he tells Enī: “Don’t be scared Enī… I will be your friend forever… (72)". However, what follows makes clear that his was primarily a sexual desire. The element of attraction becomes the base for another typical element of the Adivasi-non Adivasi relation i.e. exploitation. The figure of Nīmū embodies the exploitation of the Adivasi which he perpetuates against Enī. Enī is repeatedly abused and mistreated by Nīmū who, afraid to lose his job, married her on insistence of the school director. In this story the orientalist attraction for the other and exploitation become the two sides of the same coin. There are some elements in the representation of Enī that marks her otherness in respect to the mainstream Hindu girls and that Nīmū uses, first, to seduce her and secondly to reproach her and blame her for their affair. The lack of shyness and embarrassment in front of seduction and sexual behaviors is such an element, and such a situation takes place already at their first encounter:

82 ḍaro nahīṁ Enī… māiṁ tumhārā janm-janmāntar kā sakhā…
He did not say anything, he just looked at her for some instants. And Enī. She didn’t disliked it. On the contrary a natural smile, without any sign of shyness was drawn on her face (71). The same element of steadiness re-occurs when she visits Nīmu’s house.

‘Enī, I want to make a portrait of you. I have never seen before a woman as beautiful as you.’

Enī didn’t feel embarrassment. This was against her nature (72).

The last line specifies that not feeling embarrassment is an innate characteristic of his nature. It can be discussed whether this points to her own personal nature or if it is meant as her Adivasi nature. However, in the second case it could be argued that this element belongs to the somewhat romanticized stereotype of the Adivasi woman free from mainstream Hindu cultural restrictions on sexual behavior. If in a first place Nīmu takes advantage of this, in a second place he is ready to accuse her for having permitted him to seduce her too easily.

‘[…] you told me you were a friend of my community…’

Nīmu said with irony— ‘I know you well, you Adivasi. Who knows how many friends you have in your village. A woman doesn’t give herself to a man that easily. It seems like you were ready for that (73).’

This shows that his first positive attitude towards the Adivasi was just a means to take advantage of the circumstances while his real view of them is utterly the opposite. Thus, their marriage becomes the platform for exploitation with Nīmu becoming more evil and aggressive towards Enī. Part of his frustration comes also from the fact of being unable to satisfy his wife in their sexual life: “Thinking about the fact that he wasn’t able to satisfy Enī when they had sex made him even more frustrated. Her indifference made him crueler (73)”.

Enī’s exploitation results in an inner death. When accused of having been ‘too easy’ it is said that she ‘died’ a little from inside “vah andar se thorī-sī ‘mar’ gayī (73)”. The inner death of Enī is gradual. There are two more occasions when it is reported that she died a little bit:
more. At the end her ‘inner death’ is essentially completed as she is found in her room silent thinking about the places of her childhood.

If the exploitation of Enī is evident and central in the story, there is also a peripheral allusion to the exploitation of the lands. The setting is telling in this sense since the plot takes place in Bokāro, a city in Jharkhand on the banks of the Dāmodar River, famous for the steel factory that it hosts. This environment is in sharp contrast with the memories of Enī about her village, where the sky is blue and nature is luxuriant. Therefore, Enī’s longing for home might be interpreted as the Adivasi longing for nature. Another marginal element is the discrimination of the Adivasi. Enī is denied hospitalization in the plant hospital maybe due to the fact that she is Adivasi, forcing her to seek cure in a free sanatorium usually accessed by poor people.

3.2.9 Niyomgiri rājā

3.2.9.1 Summary

In a small town of Odisha surrounded by mountains, a non-Adivasi has settled moving from Ranchi. It is an Adivasi quarter that he has moved to, which, together with a big part of the town, back in the time was completely covered by forest and fields. Later on businessmen and moneylenders came from Andhra Pradesh and took over the land enlarging the town letting it fall in a state of decay. Close to it there is a mountain which the narrator describes as mystical and astonishing, having the shape of a huge old man resting under the sky. He asks a tea-seller if someone lives there and thus he learns that the mountain is the home of the Kondh Adivasi who prey a God called Niyomgiri Rājā. The narrator gets interested and calls a friend of him asking for more details. The two agree on having a trip to a village where an assembly will take place. The friend explains that the area is rich of Bauxite and that the Vedanta Company (a non-fictive company) has opened some plants though without finding any Bauxite. Therefore they want to mine on the mountain but the Adivasi have opposed the projects. This assembly will be the last one. They head for the mountain together with the friend’s wife, some journalists and a local guide. On the way up he learns more about the people living there, for example, that they live only above a certain altitude, cultivating tea, fruits and some vegetables. An interesting feature of this people is that they only drink water of waterfalls and thus they are against the construction of hand pumps. They pass a group of armed men whom the narrator takes for Maoists but in reality they are posted militaries to secure the territory. It seems that the Maoists want to boycott the assembly. The next person they encounter is a young man cutting trees on a slope. The narrator asks him about the Niyomgiri Rājā and the young man starts telling that they, as well as all animals and plants
are his subjects and that if they will not follow his rules they will get destruction and death. They finally reach the village where all people are gathered at the assembly. There are also journalists, photographers and reporters. The young women and men bare ornaments and girls have Hibiscus flowers on their heads while boys keep choppers in their hands. Even girls have small knives with them, kept in their braided hair. The assembly takes place in a tent where the magistrate of the district, a clerk, a translator and the voters are sitting. The magistrate starts talking about the Vedanta Company that wants to mine in the region. This will bring a road, electricity and employment for the local people. However, all voters are reluctant and give a negative answer. One by one the voters give a short replay arguing that they don’t want and don’t need the company. The assembly ends with dances and songs.

3.2.9.2 Analysis

The formula of the narrator as an outsider used in other stories is repeated here. The interest of the narrator is first directed to the mysterious mountain that stands above the city. Already there it is possible to see some kind of romantic fascination: “… a mountain, looking vast and mystical, was standing (77)”. The interest grows as he finds out that the mountain is habited by Adivasi and he eagerly catches his opportunity “It didn’t take me a second to decide (79)”.

At several points of the narration the sympathy of the narrator for the Adivasi comes up, for instance when he makes acquaintance with the local guide: “It was the first time I met him, but I quickly developed a fraternal relation (79)”. Moreover, there are instances where the Adivasi are described as being of kind manners as in the case when the narrator seeks shelter from the rain under the umbrella of an Adivasi who without opposing resistance makes some space for him. This might also be interpreted as a stereotyped idea of an innate proneness of sharing things, perhaps in contrast to the mainstream society’s selfishness. The romanticized fascination for the Adivasi is often revealed by the way they are described. For instance when they reach the village the narrator reports that:

Many journalists from my own world, photographers, worried women reporter of electronic media… But distinguished among all them, looking as jungle flowers, were the Dogri and Kondh young men and women (83).
Men are said to carry weapons with them and even women keep a knife in the decoration of their hair.

Nature plays an important role and it intersects with the Adivasi contributing to the shaping of an idyllic picture. On the way to the village the narrator is overwhelmed by the magnificence of nature:

I was looking at the colossal shape of nature with restless eyes, and I spontaneously uttered— ‘There are settlements on the pinnacle of that sharp mountain, this lies beyond my imagination’ (79).\textsuperscript{91}

The language used in the description of the mountain is a register of Hindi characterized by an extensive use of Sanskrit words which can also be interpreted as part of the romanticizing of the environment. This is particularly evident in the passage where the mountain is compared to a giant old man lying under the sky:

\textit{Lagā jaise koī virāṭ vṛddh puruṣ khule āsmān ke niīce viśrām kar rahā ho. Bhavy lalāt, nāk aur ṭuddhī. Bagal menī pare dūr-dūr tak cale gaye bājū\textsuperscript{92}. Kyā īskā nirmān prakṛti ne anāyās kiya, yā mān nav prayās pahār ke śikhar ko yah rūp diyā gayā hai (77).}

It looked like a colossal old man resting under the wide open sky. Sublime front, nose and chin. On the side his shoulders stretched for a long way. Did nature made it spontaneously, or did man give it that shape to the top of the mountain?

The relation between Adivasi and nature is so strong that in his eyes the Adivasi man encountered on the way to the mountain is completely fused in it: “He had become one thing with nature and the environment to such an extent that he looked like the work of a sculptor (82)”\textsuperscript{93}.

This story is perhaps the one where the issue of exploitation of the Adivasi land is depicted most directly. The criticism towards the appropriation of land and its degradation is visible already in the first lines where the narrator blames businessmen and moneylenders for having put their hands on the land and led the town to its decline.

\textsuperscript{91} \textit{maīn atṛt nigāhōṁ se prakṛti ke is virāṭ rūp ko dekhāt rahā aur mere muṁh se anāyās nikal gayā— ‘is tikṣṇ pahār kī cotiyoṁ par bastiyāṁ hongi, yah to kaipnātīt lagī hai mujhe’}.  
\textsuperscript{92} \textit{bagal} and \textit{bājū} are the only Persio-Arabic words used here. 
\textsuperscript{93} \textit{prakṛti aur pariveś se vah ias kadar ekākār ho cukā thā ki ekbāṛgī kisi murtikār kī kalākrit jaisā lagā}. 

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… rice businessmen came from Andhra Pradesh bringing trade and moneylending, and the land slipped in their hands. Then they opened a governmental office. The district headquarter was built and the town fell in the present state of decay (77).94

The events narrated refer to the real happenings concerning the legal battle between the Kondh tribe and the Vedanta Company. The latter was accused by the Kondh Adivasi to have polluted the waters, soils and air due to their mining in search of Bauxite, a search that would have continued to the Niyomgiri Mountain if unstopped. In 2013 the supreme court of India concluded to let the Kondh people decide to give or not Vedanta Company the permission of excavation, which the Kondh strenuously opposed.

There are strong elements of an ecological understanding of Adivasi issues eco-criticism. For instance it is reported that the Dogri don’t want water pumps to be constructed since they exclusively drink water from waterfalls. Similarly, even though they need a road, they don’t want a four lane road to be built since that would ruin the forest (jaṅgal kā bhārī vināś hogā, 80). Thus the Adivasi are represented here showing a certain degree of eco-thinking. However, there are also some contradictory behaviors for example the use that Adivasi make of aluminum decorations which ironically is produced by the Vedanta Company. It is interesting that such contradictions are part of the plot. They testify that the ecological awareness is not an innate quality of any population but it is rather an outcome scientific knowledge. The Adivasi see the harm that mining the mountain causes to them in terms of pollution and degradation of water sources and forest destruction, but they might be less aware of the pollution coming from aluminum itself, and by the fact that the demand of aluminum inevitably favors the producing companies.

In addition to the ecological arguments, the Adivasi also speak in terms of religious belief and it is hard at times to see the boundary between the two. Religion and ecological awareness may go hand in hand since the divine mountain provides its inhabitants with water and food, destroying the mountain would therefore make the God angry and eventually it would stop providing living ressources for the Adivasi. Therefore, to a certain extant eco-sustainability is a part of their religious believes. The issue of religion becomes the subject for a brief discussion between the narrator and his friend, with the former arguing that it is simply superstition. However, following the reasoning of the friend it might be argued that

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94 ... ōndhr se āye cāval vyavsāyiyorī ne yahāṁ ṛkar dhandhā aur mahājanī śurū kī aur zamīn unke hāthorī merī khiskatā calā gayā. bād merī sarkārī daftar khule. zilā mukhyālay banā aur sahar vartmān rūp merī dal gayā.
the argument transpiring is that the religion of the Adivasi is not less illogical than mainstream religions’ believes.

‘If Ganesh can drink milk, Hanuman sweat and Jesus, the messiah, cry then why can’t this thing be too?’

‘In other words, pure superstition’

Bādal took a deep breath.

‘How much difference is there between faith and superstition?’

It is interesting that despite arguing that Adivasi religion is not much more illogical than other religions, he nevertheless calls them ‘primitive tribe’ (primitiv trāśv). The perceived backwardness of the Adivasi includes the backwardness of their religion.

3.2.10 Ţīś

3.2.10.1 Summary

Rāmdayāl is a young and clever Adivasi who managed to go to college and likes to engage himself in intellectual problems and debates. Since some days he is afflicted by an abscess on his back which has now grown bigger and more painful. The previous weekend, as usual, he went back to his village where a Hindu missionary was trying to convince the population to give their permission for the construction of a Hindu temple. When a young man replies that Adivasi don’t go to temples the missionary starts arguing that the relation between Hindus and the Vanvasi goes back to the time of Rama when he was wandering in the forests with his brother Lakshman and wife Sita. Then the Vanvasi helped Rama to find and rescue Sita after that Ravana captured her. He goes on saying “We are the descendants of Rama and you of Hanuman”.

He then finishes stating that Hindus have forgotten about their brothers Vanvasi and that today the Vanavasi also have forgotten that they are Hindus: “You forgot

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95 This refers to three supernatural phenomena or miracles. The first case is a happening occurred in 1995 when the statue of Ganesh in a temple of New Delhi is said to have drank the milk offered with a spoon. The second probably refers to the myth about Hanuman told in the Ramayana according to which a fish got pregnant by drinking a drop of Hanuman’s sweat. The third is connected with the the many stories that tells about a statue of Jesus or the Vergin Maria crying. This mention might refer to the specific case occurred in Chittagong, Bangladesh in 2003 (Lawson, 2003).

96 ‘jab ganeś ji dūdh pi sakā hair, hanumān ji ke badan se pasinā nikāl saktā hai aur īsā masīh ke ānkhōṁ se āṃsā, phir yah kyon nahiṁ ho saktā?
‘matlab nirā andhviśvās’
Bādal ne māna gahrī śvās ī.
‘vīśvās aur andhviśvās merī fark hī kitnā hai? […]’

97 The missionary does not use the term Adivasi but Vanvasi which bears the political implication of rejecting the thesis of their anteriority.

98 ham usi Rām ke vanīsāj hue aur tum sab usi vīr Hanumān ke.
that you are Hindu too (87)". After some discussion Rāmdayāl finally accuses the missionary that the temple is just an excuse to come back and move claims on the land. The missionary assures that they will just build a temple, a school for the children, a hospital and if they want even a youth club but Rāmdayāl stays firm on his position. The next day he discusses the matter with a friend who asks what harm can the construction of the temple do to them. Rāmdayāl is very aware of the consequences since he has already seen similar situations in Ranchi. Bankers come, houses and shops are built, and traders start driving their businesses bringing their ‘development’ while the Adivasi end up driving obese women on the riksha. He knows that traders buy at a law price the products of the Adivasi to sell them for much higher prices in the bazars. The friends move on the topic of religion and Rāmdayāl tells the myth of origin of his community comparing it with the myths of other religions such as Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. He finds their own myth the most logical and the closest to scientific knowledge. Suddenly the pain from his back gets stronger. It seems quite serious and therefore they decide to go to the hospital. At the hospital the doctor cleans the wound and prepares the tools for a small surgery intervention. Rāmdayāl scared by the syringe asks him to not use anesthesia. The doctor laughs saying that he thought that Adivasi people were strong and did not feel pain. On the contrary during the operation Rāmdayāl suffers quite a lot and at the end after having thanked the doctor he is about to tell him that Adivasi feels pain too but he refrains from doing so, thinking that the doctor would probably not believe him.

3.2.10.2 Analysis

In this story the exploitation of Adivasi is considered in a more subtle way. The dikū here are not usurpers of the Adivasi lands in a concrete sense, the missionary accompanied by some traders only proposes the construction of a temple. This might seem a quite innocent act, if not a philanthropist one done in the name of religion. However the response of one of the villagers ‘we don’t go to the temple (86)’ points to the fundamental critical attitude towards of building a temple and the insistence of the missionary suggests a hidden purpose, which is to redefine Adivasi identity in terms of Hinduism. Rāmdayāl, the educated Adivasi who lives in Ranchi, knows what the hidden purpose is and therefore he opposes the missionary’s arguments. The discussion between the two is at first based on religion and
culture with *Rāmdayāl* affirming the Adivasi’s separateness from Hinduism and other religions:

‘We all look the same. Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christians… but we are all different. We believe in different religions, speaking different languages. Our ways of living are all different.’ (87)\(^{101}\)

The missionary knows that the Adivasi of that area are a target of Christian missionaries and therefore establishing a relation on the religious sphere might be a good strategy. Therefore he asks *Rāmdayāl* “What is your religion? What’s its origin? When and how did it come to be? (87)”.\(^{102}\) *Rāmdayāl* needs to think about it which suggests that he has never analyzed his own religion in such terms and at his answer “We are worshippers of nature (87)\(^{103}\) the missionary invokes the pluralistic character of Hinduism:

There are many branches of Hinduism. There are worshippers of God as having a form, worshippers of a formless God. There are also worshippers of nature (88).\(^{104}\)

The missionary then, in a last attempt of finding a relation between Hinduism and Adivasi believes, goes perhaps too far stating that Shiva lingam represents a small mountain. The reaction of *Rāmdayāl*, colored by an evident sarcasm reveals the absurdity of this statement “Vagina and penis symbolize a mountain? (88)”.\(^{105}\) The missionary, perhaps realizing that his opponent is quite prepared, argues that being he (*Rāmdayāl*) well educated as he can infer from his technical vocabulary typical of high Hindi, argues that this title of Shiva were first a deity of the non-Aryan (*anāriyoṁ ke ṛ ā ṃ devtā thē*) which was later on adopted by the Aryans and in this way the Adivasi became Hindus. This passage suggests the overall nonsense of the missionary’s argumentations. The rhetorical strategy is not only aimed at incorporating the Adivasi in the bulk of Hindu religion but also at assuring which is the hierarchical relation between them. The Adivasi are meant to be a part of Hindu tradition so that the latter can act as a big brother towards the former, creating a pretext for building a temple. The vocabulary of the missionary reflects his ideology, in fact, as already mentioned, he always refers to the Adivasi with term *Vanvāsi*\(^{106}\). Not all people in the village can understand the real intentions of the missionary work but *Rāmdayāl* does, and he is not ready to let them take over so

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\(^{101}\) ‘dikhte to ham sab ek jaise haiṁ. kyā hindū, kyā musalmān, kyā sikh aur kyā īsāi…lekin ham sab alag hai. alag-alag dham ko māṁne vāle. alag-alag bhāṣāṁ bolne vāle. hamāre rahan-sahan kā tarikā alag-alag hai.’

\(^{102}\) tumhāra kaun-sā dharm hai. uskī utpatti kab aur kaise huī?

\(^{103}\) ham prakṛit pūjak hai.

\(^{104}\) hindū dham kī anek sākhāyemān haiṁ. ismerīṁ tūvar ke saguṇ rāp ke upāsak haiṁ. nirguṇ rāp ke upāsak haiṁ. prakṛit pūjak bhi.

\(^{105}\) yonī aur ling kā yah pratik ciḥn pahār hai?

\(^{106}\) The meaning and use of these terms was discussed in details in section 2.1.
easily. It shall be pointed out that Rāmdayāl is not against innovation altogether, in fact he still wants to build a youth club but he rejects the help of the traders. Thus it is clear that his position is not the product of a stubborn attachment to the ‘old way of living’ but it comes from an analysis of the current state of things. In his reasoning there is also a note of pessimism, and in fact he is aware that he and his friends are small and have no power on the village.

The relation between the Adivasi and Hindu religion is complex and here this is shown by the fact that when Uncle recites the Ramayana, Rāmdayāl is pleased and at the same time offended:

Rāmdayāl liked to listen. But today, without knowing why, he perceived as an offense the telling of being descendants of Hanuman (87)\(^ {107} \).

This indicates that if at one side he completely rejects the rhetoric of the missionary he is somehow still attracted by Hinduism. Other people of the village have heard that reading the Hanumān cālīsā will keep ghosts away. Thus, even in a situation of tension between different believes and religions there is some space for overlapping between Adivasi and mainstream Hindu religion. The issue of religion is also discussed between Rāmdayāl and his friends. His friend Jayprakāś is astonished to hear him, the most learned of the group speaking about the origin of the world in religious terms. Rāmdayāl is not out trying to prove the veracity of their myth, but rather to show that as well as all other religions they also have one, confirming their their different identity. Rāmdayāl states: “We also have a story and to my understanding, of all stories it is the most scientific and logical (90)”\(^ {108} \).

3.2.11 Mor

3.2.11.1 Summary

This is the story about an Adivasi village which gets in a legal dispute with the ruling king. Everything begins with a hunting trip where a young Adivasi called Jovākim kills a peacock (mor in Hindi). His fellow Rakhāl reminds him of the edict of the king that prohibits everyone to kill peacocks. However, now it’s too late and the group heads back to the village with their prey. At the village the peacock is cooked and all people gather to eat and feast with dancing and singing. Somehow the king comes to know what has happened and in response he sends a group of soldiers to capture the one who violated his law. The soldiers go

\(^ {107} \) Rāmdayāl ko acchā hi laṅtā thā sunkar. lekin āj na jāne kyorān hanumān ke varṇṣaj batāye jāne se use gahre apmān kā bodh huā.

\(^ {108} \) hamāre pās bhi kahānī hai aur merī samajh se in sab kahānīyōṁī se adhik vaijñānik, tarksarīgat.
to the village and seize Jovākim but surprisingly his wife Phūlo makes hard resistance and threats the soldiers with a chopper. At that point all the others encircle the soldiers who, unprepared to this kind of reaction, are unable to defend themselves. The Adivasi send the soldiers back to the king, who enraged decides to punish the village with a five rupees fine. The village is already paying the regular land revenue and other rents, a five rupees fine is a cost they absolutely cannot manage to pay. The villagers gather to discuss what they can do. After some suggestions, Jovākim rises his voice and proposes to invoke the help of Father Linus, a Belgian Christian missionary who, due to his missionary work, is acquainted with the Adivasi and also speak their language. Some people are suspicious about him since he is a white man who probably only wants to convert them to Christianity but after some discussion all agree to talk to him. Father Linus comes to the village and promises that he will talk to the tax collector in Ranchi. Back in Ranchi Father Linus takes up the matter with the tax collector without coming to a common agreement. The story ends there with the narrator saying that it isn’t known whether the matter was solved in the office of the collector or in the law court but in any case the village was saved from the rage of the king and ultimately was converted to Christianity.

3.2.11.2 Analysis

The setting of this story is again an Adivasi village but the time of the narration is set between the 18th and 19th century. The topic of the story is the legal dispute between the king and the Adivasi village. The village in question is habited by the Asur people an ethnic group concentrated in today’s state of Jharkhand. The exploiter is rājā Harnāth who imposes the fine on the village. The edit on the prohibition of killing peacocks and the resistance made by the villagers reveal the real intentions of the king that is to take the land from the Adivasi. This becomes quite clear as the news of the killing of a peacock reaches his ears: “First he got angry. Then a wicked smile appeared on his lips. Now the Asur will not be able to save their village (95)”109. Later on when his soldiers come back defeated by the villagers the purpose of the king is made even clearer: “If all their land will not be usurped and them driven into the forest his name is not Harnāth for real. (98)”110 The fine of five rupees to be paid in a month is a sum that the king knows they can’t pay and the consequence of the nonpayment

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109 pahle to use gussā āyā. phir homthom par phail gayī ek kutīl muskān. abkī nahīṁ bacā pāyerīnge ye asur apnī zamīn.

110 unkī sārī zamīn chīn unheṁ jarigal merṁ hāṅk nahīṁ diyā to uskā nām Harnāth sāhī nahīṁ.
will be the selling of all their lands “all the lands qualified for cultivation will be sold out (99)”111

The village is far away from mainstream Hindu society as they live in the forest practicing both agriculture and, hunt and gathering when needed. In fact the hunt expedition that opens the narration was meant to supply the village with additional food after that the harvested grain was finished in the homes. The characters are less developed than in other short stories but still there are some descriptive elements. When Jovākim is interrogated by the soldier who asks him whether he killed the peacock despite the ban he does not reply because on one side he can’t admit that he did it and on the other he is not used to lie “telling lies wasn’t his habit (97)”.112 Not only Jovākim but all Adivasi in general are depicted as positive figures. To begin with none in the village blames Jovākim for what has happened. On the contrary all gather in the village and discuss the matter in order to find a solution. At the end of the story when Father Linus stresses the virtues of the Adivasi in contrast to the Hindus he says: “Adivasi113 are honest and hardworking. Hindus are negligent and idle. The only thing they know how to do is flattery (106)”.114 Moreover, the collector agrees with this analysis. When the king’s soldiers arrive at the village they are immediately fed showing that Adivasi honor their guests. However Jovākim also suggests to plunder another village in order to get the money to pay the fine which means that their values are anyway are not the same as the Christian values of Father Linus.

Phūlo is the only female character but she plays an important role. She saves Jovākim from the soldiers threatening them with a chopper and she understands the real intentions of the king:

She knew that her husband was feeling guilty for all the accident. But she also believed that he had not guilt. Water, jungle and land are of everybody. How could hunting make one a criminal? The king needed the land of the Asur. With any excuse. He had sent a message earlier demanding the villagers to give up the claim on the sandy banks of the river. He wanted to colonize a village there. But the villagers were not ready to let that happen. The outsiders came close to the village and settled, this wasn’t accepted. And now this turmoil was set up (100).115

111 gāṁv kī sārö khetī yog zamīn nilām ho jāyegī.
112 jhāṭh bolne kī use ādat nahīn.
113 The term Adivasi is improperly used since it is uttered by a character in a story set in a time long before the term was coined.
114 ādīvāśī māṇḍār aur mehnātī hotē haim. hindā kāḥīl aur kāṁcār haim. ve sīr cāpāšī karna jānte haim.
115 vah jānti thi kī uskā patī pūrī ghatnā ke lie khud ko doṣī mān rahā hai. lekin vah yah bhi māntī thi kī uskā koī doṣ nahīn. jai, jaṅgal, zamīn to sab kā hai. śikār kar liyā to vah aparādhi kaise ho gayā? rājā ko to asur gāṁv kī zamīn cāhīe. kīś bhi bahānē. vah pahle bhi yah sandeś gāṁvvālōṁ ko bhej cukā hai kī nādi pār kī tār zamīn par
This passage shows on one hand the Adivasi relation to the ecosystem they live in i.e. that water, jungle and land are meant to be for collective use and on the other that the king aims at taking over it and make it his propriety. Falling between the Adivasi and the king is Father Linus. It is Jovākim who proposes to seek his advice. The first reaction from the others is negative: “Immediately an objection was raised— “Who? That priest? We don’t want to become Christians (101)”\textsuperscript{116}. It is interesting that despite the aversion to Christianity the name of the main character is Jovākim, suggesting that in some way Christianity had already had some impact on them. Even though the villagers at first rejects Jovākim’s suggestion, Phūlo wisely points out that the king himself is black and still he mistreats them, convincing the others to seek his help. Father Linus is perceived as being a British, as he is white, talks the same language and follow the same religion. When Rakhāl asks Jovākim if Father Linus will be able to save them from the rage of the king by speaking with the collector in Ranchi, this answers: “Why not? Father and the British are both white. They speak in the same way. They have the same religion (104)”\textsuperscript{117}. In reality Father Linus is Belgian and has become acquainted with the Adivasi learning their language and customs in order to convert them. He has also learnt that Adivasi are not Hindus and that they have been oppressed by Hinduism making them an easy target for conversion. In fact it is reported that many Mudas had already been converted by him. Thus it isn’t clear whether his friendship with the Adivasi is real or if it covers a religious agenda. The relation between Adivasi and Christian missionary work is yet another aspect taken up in this story which might seem of secondary importance since Father Linus only acts as an intermediary between the Adivasi and the state. Nevertheless the only certainty in the conclusion is that the village ultimately converted to Christianity.

3.2.12. Hūl

3.2.12.1 Summary

Hūl narrates the story of the historical Adivasi rebellion (known as Santal Hool) that took place in 1854-56 and claimed more than ten thousand Adivasi’s lives (Gupta, 2007: 15). The story begins one night of 1855. Dāṁtom Māṁnjhī is desperately roaming in the jungle in search of his daughter Salonī. Some hours before she had been captured by the local moneylender Kenārīrām and his men who, having visited Dāṁtom Māṁnjhī and found him

\textsuperscript{116} ek aitrāj vālā svar turant uthā—kisse? us pādrī se. hamērī kristān nāhiṁ bannā hai.
\textsuperscript{117} kyon nāhiṁ? fādar aur angréz— donoṁ gore hainm. ve ek tarah kī bhāsā bolte hainm. unkā dharam ek hai.
unable to pay back his debts, dragged her away. She was brought to the house of Kenārīrām and abused with Dāntom Mānnjhī locked out begging to have his daughter back. When the moneylender let Salonī go, Dāntom Mānnjhī was lying half asleep on the ground and was not fast enough to stop her and so she quickly walked to the forest with his father running after her. Eventually Dāntom Mānnjhī finds her dead body hanging on a mango tree. He then goes to the village and tells his people what has happened. All the village heads off to take revenge. On the way they encounter other groups of Adivasi headed by Sidho and Kānu118 who also tell about similar injustices they have suffered and decide to join the group. They are going to Calcutta to meet ‘the white man’ in hope that this will listen to them. They set a camp and start cooking food, dancing and singing. The noise of the Adivasi reaches a nearby bazar where some Hindu zamindars and moneylenders are sleeping. Hearing the noises they woke up and get afraid. After some days noticing that the Adivasi have gathered in a great number they send the police inspector to capture Sidho and Kānu who are at the leadership of the group. When the inspector comes he himself is captured and hearing that he came to arrest Sidho and Kānu he gets killed. The group now moves towards Kenārīrām, they burst into his house and Dāntom Mānnjhī murders him. Then they go on marching. On the way they beg food in the bazars and if not given willingly they take it with force killing all zamindars, policemen, moneylenders and even some British soldiers that oppose them. At the same time they spread the word of the revolt to other Adivasi who join their march. The news about the Adivasi revolt reaches the governor general of Calcutta who having imprisoned one rebel asks him what they want. The rebel says that all they want is relief from the dikū. The governor general unconcerned of the situation of the Adivasi changes argument and starts asking him about the army that they have formed. He instructs an officer to take the command of an army and fight the rebels. Soon the information of where the Adivasi group are staying reaches the British who head off to fight them. The battle takes place and the Adivasi who cannot match the weapons of the British are exterminated.

3.2.12.2 Analysis

The topic lifted up in hūl is the struggle of the Adivasi against the injustice of the local zamindars and moneylenders on one hand, and the British government on the other hand. In its beginning the story deals with the criminal act carried on by the moneylender against Dāntom Mānnjhī’s daughter. Dāntom Mānnjhī and Salonī are defenseless in front of the

118 These are non-fictional characters who were at the leadership of the rebellion (Gupta, 2007: 15).
moneylenders and his men. As they head off they meet other Adivasi who have suffered similar offenses:

One was complaining— In our region a railway has been laid. We are getting jobs, but the jungle is being destroyed. Big trees are laid down on the ground. The contractor beats our workers. Our women are being dishonored (109).  

The group grows in number and the scope of the march becomes generalized to all injustices that they suffer. All those who in a way or another exploit the Adivasi be it Indians or British falls under the label dikū, a term which is not understood by the governor general when this one interrogates the Adivasi prisoner:

‘What do the rebels want?’

‘We don’t want anything sahib. We want relief from the moneylenders, from the dikū. We wanted to bring here this complaint and meet you’.

‘Whom are you calling dikū?’

The prisoner remained silent.

‘Speak up, who are the dikū?’

‘Sahib, dikū are those that are stealing our lands. They make us homeless on our own land. The moneylenders are dikū. The contractors are dikū. Your police inspectors, the sepoys, the staff of the public offices are dikū’. (113)

In addition to the incomprehension due to the use of the word dikū, the governor general asserts the sovereignty of the state on the lands:

‘How can the land be yours? The land is ours. The government is the owner. We had you settled in that region.’

The prisoner replied with obstinacy and in full voice ‘No sahib, the land and the jungle is all ours. You caused us to settle, but we cleaned the forest cultivating the land. So how is it yours?’ (113)

119 kōi ek fāriyād kar rahā thā—hamāre ilāke merī relve lāīn bich rahā hai. hameṁ kāṁ to mil rahā hai, lekin jaṅgal kā nāś ho rahā hai. bare-bare pēr dhartī par bich rahe haiṁ. tekeṭār hamāri majdūrī māṛtā hai. hamāri auratōṁ ko beijjat kartā hai.

120 ‘vidrohi kyā māṅgtā hai?’

‘ham kuch nahiṁ māṅgtā saḥab. ham mahājanomī se, dikūṁṁ se chūṭkāṛā cāhte haiṁ. ham yahī phariyād lekar to āpse milne yahāṁ āṅā cāhte the’.

‘tum kisko dikū kahtā?’

Bandī khāṁoś raḥā.

‘bolo, dikū kaun hai?’

‘sāḥab, dikū vah jo hamse hamāri jāmin chīṁ rahā hai. hamāri hi jāmin par hamse begār karātā hai. mahājan dikū. tekeṭār dikū. tumhārā dāroğā, sipāḥī, kachāṛī ka aṁlā dikū’

121 ‘zāmn tumhārā kaise? zāmin hamārā hai. sarkār uskā mālīk. hamne tum logoṁ ko us ilāke merī basāyā’

Bandī ne zīd—bhare svar merī—‘nahiṁ sāḥab, zamīn-jaṅgal sab hamārā. tumne hamerī basāyā, lekin jaṅgal sāf kar khet to hamne banāyā. fir tumhārā kaise?’
The passage illustrates the clash between two distinct cultures that have difficulties in communicate since not only their language is different but also their view on the environment. Strictly speaking the dialogue is somewhat artificial since it is improbable that a Santal Adivasi and the governor general shared a lingua franca.

The representation of the Adivasi here is that of those who suffer for the injustices. In several instances they are compared to animals giving form to vivid and strong images. When Salonī is captured it is said that a man of the moneylender caught her and dragged her away as if she was cattle (107).122 Similarly Dāntom Mā́njhī is compared to an animal when he falls exhausted on the bare land (108).123 As Salonī is being abused she utters animal-like sounds (kisī jānvar kī tarah hāṁk dī thi, 108). Ultimately her aspect has so much ruined by her aggressors that leaving the house she is described as a shadow (108).124 Likewise her father reaching the village is said to have the aspect of a ghost (108).125 Even when he takes his revenge on Kenārāṁ his eyes look like those of a predator (111).126 Despite their sufferings the Adivasi have the power to react and even if they can’t match the military power of the British army they are anyway perceived as a threat: “…they are even more dangerous people. People who likes freedom (114).”127 The story takes thus the shade of a freedom fight, and as many freedom fights this too ends with a terrible defeat.

3.2.13 Budhnī
3.2.13.1 Summary

A feast opens the scene. A contractor and an officer are visiting the village where they are welcomed with singing and dancing. The purpose of the visit is to choose a girl that at the inauguration of the power station of the dam built in the area, will have to put a garland around the neck of the prime minister. The choice falls on Budhnī, a young, beautiful girl who is performing a traditional dance. The next day the contractor and the officer come back and propose their idea to the villagers. Sālkhan, one of the villagers, agrees on the importance of welcoming the prime minister but he also shares his concerns about the fact that since the dam was built the water level of the river decreased and yet the villagers haven’t got either

122 use maveśī kī tarah hī pokar liyā aur ghaśite col diyā.
123 thakā-hārā dā̢̤ntom vahīm naṅgī gīli zamīn par paśu kī tarah pārā rahā.
124 salonī calī jā raḥī thi kisī chāyā kī tarah.
125 kisī prēt kī tarah lag rahā thi.
126 uskī āṅkhēnī hīmstr paśu kī tarah camak raḥī thi.
127 ... usse bī hāṁ hōtānāk log hāi [sic]. āzād pasand log.
any compensation or jobs. The contractor assures him that all this things will be soon resolved, but the inauguration must have the priority. Budhnī and Roban (the drums player) are called and despite some uncertainty they are eventually convinced by the promise of getting a steady job. The big day comes and Budhnī and Roban perform in front of the public and the prime minister, with Budhnī at last putting the garland around the prime minister’s neck. The prime minister then says a few words, stressing the importance of the dam for a ‘modern India’ and the ‘green revolution’ that the dam is supposed to represent. He lets Budhnī press the bottom to officially inaugurate the dam and the celebration is over. Budhnī returns home thinking about the gifts she will be able to give her parents once she will start earning money. At the village she meets a tense atmosphere. Sālkhan and her father let her know that by putting the garland around the neck of the prime minister she automatically chose him as her husband and thus she cannot stay anymore in the village. This is the decision of the panchayat. Her father cannot oppose the decision and therefore Budhnī leaves the village. After wandering in the forest she finally reaches a building site and falls asleep. The day after the contractor and his clerk driving on a jeep find Budhnī on the street and pick her up. She tells what has happened and reminds the contractor about his promise of giving her a job. He then asks her to work at his home but Bhudhnī refuses and insists on the promised job. The contractor tells her that her ‘file’ has not come yet and thus she leaves. At evening she ends up in the bazar and finds shelter in a travel shed where other people are gathered. There she meets other villagers who have had similar experiences. Their lands have been exploited on the promise of compensations, jobs and electricity that ultimately never came and force them to move to the cities where they make a miserable living as casual workers. Among these she makes the acquaintance of Raghunāth. The two start talking about their past and at the end Raghunāth proposes her to follow him at his place. They next day they go together to the camp where they meet the contractor and Raghunāth manages to convince him to employ Budhnī. Budhnī starts a new life working at the camp and living with Raghunāth. However, one day, coming home from the camp Budhnī finds Raghunāth playing cards with his friends and scolds him for not having locked the house door. His friends start mocking him saying that he did a mistake taking a jungle-girl in his house, and that now she will order him about. Raghunāth gets angry and beats Budhnī who reveals to be pregnant. With the time Raghunāth becomes more and more irritable. He blames Budhnī for not having got rid of the baby and spends the time playing cards with his friends rather than working. One day Budhnī gets insulted at work with deprecatory and racist comments and at last the contractor chases her away. At home, Raghunāth gets angry and kicks her out of the house.
Budhnī goes to the bazar and gets drunk. She then comes back at night shouting bad words towards Raghunāth and the contractor. At last she falls on the ground cursing her family for having banned her from the village rather than having sacrificed her.

3.2.13.2 Analysis

Budhnī is a tragic play based on a real story dealing with what is perhaps the main theme of Adivasi literature i.e. the exploitation of lands in the name of development (vikāś). The setting is the Damodar Valley in eastern Jharkhand, an area which has seen the construction of several dams in the 1950s, among which the Panchet dam (mentioned in the story) in 1958. The inauguration took place one year later, in 1959, at the presence of the then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Budhnī, the main character, is non-fictive, as the episode of the inauguration of the power station as well as the rejection of Budhnī by the village’s panchayat is non-fictive. A young Santali girl called Budhnī did in fact press the bottom and put a garland around the prime minister’s neck thus ‘marrying him’ and getting chased out of her village (Padmanabhan, 2012).

The play based on this event wants to testify how state policies aimed at bringing progress to the country and its people have had in fact tragic effects for the Adivasi. The relation between growing development and Adivasi’s exploitation is put forward by the stage-manager in the
introduction, warning the public that what he is going to say might sound paradoxical. Thus he states that:

Everyone says ‘build roads, let electricity come to the villages and they will have development’. I say no…the roads will destroy villages’ life and wash away all the green from fields and granaries and it will give back only infertile sand… […] believe, where electricity will come, the original inhabitants will be ruined (119).

Thus development, despite being a word with a positive connotation, may also hide a dark side. At a certain point the stage-manager asks himself “What is development? (125)” giving multiple interpretations to it but without coming to a conclusion. The vocabulary used by the prime minister is full of words having a positive connotation. Compare the following passage:

“These dams, these factories are the temples of modern India, where the light of knowledge breaks, there the doors of prosperity open. […] From the water accumulated in these dams a green revolution will take place. (126)”

Words as ‘modern India’, ‘light of knowledge’, ‘prosperity’ and ‘green revolution’ shape the rhetoric of development. In addition, calling the dams ‘temples of modern India’ the rhetoric of modernity and development gets a religious value. However, religion craves its sacrifices and thus development. The stage-manager wants the public to know that in the rush of development Adivasi have become the sacrificial offering: “On the offering ground of development hundreds of Adivasi families have been sacrificed (120)”. Sadly, the overall scope of rhetoric is often hide rather than show things and when positive words are not sufficient the discourse needs to be accompanied by unrealistic promises: “Where one harvest was yielded, three harvests will be yielded (126)”.

The play also takes up the discrimination, and being Budhnī a woman she is double victimized suffering both racist and sexist offenses. In several occasions she becomes the object of desire of men. The contractor, who would like to have her working at his home, the clerks at her working place, the friends of Raghunāth and of course Raghunāth himself, who

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128 The term used in the play is ulaṭbāṁsī, which in Kabir’s tradition is referred to as obscure or even incomprehensible lines.
129 sab kahte hain saṅk banā do, gāṁv tak bijli pahumcā do vikās ho jāyegā. maṁ kahtā hūṁ nahīṁ… saṅkem gāṁv kā sārā sattv har leṁgī gāṁv aur unke ās-pās ke khet-khalihānom se sārī hariyāli do le jāyegī aer de jāyegī ap saṁskṛti ki ret-hi-ret… yākīn kara, jidhar bijli gayī, udhar se ujar jāyēngē mulvāsī…
130 mere jehan ko yah savāl matthā naṛhta hai ki vikās kyā hai?
131 ye ḍaim, ye kal-kārkhaṇe ādhunik bhārat ke mandir haim jahāṁ se jīān ki roṣī phūṭegī, samṛddhi ke dvār khumēngē. […] in ḍaimom mem saṁcit pānī se is īlāke men harit krānti hogī.
132 vikās ki bēdī par bali cahr gaye saikrōṁ ādīvāsī parivār.
133 jahāṁ ek fasal hotā hai, vahāṁ tin-tin fasalen horīgī.
rejects her as soon as she loses her job, are all negative male figures acting against her and making her the sexualized image of the Adivasi woman. Thus there is also a feminist aspect condemning the way the male characters treat Budhnī.

4. REPRESENTATIONAL STRATEGIES

4.1 The narrator

4.1.1 The narrator as a visitor in the world of the ‘other’

The short stories and the drama can be divided between those where the narrator is inside the plot (I person narration) and those where the narrator is outside the plot (III person narration). First person narration comprehends seven short stories: Ek duniyā alag sī, Kāṭh cāhie, Bhaginī, Ham bhī hindū, Bhūrī āṅkheṁ, Karkī and Niyomgiri rājā. Third person narration is found in Cāṅdēni rātem, Ek thī enī, Ṭīs, Mor, Hūl and in the play Bhudnī.

In the first case, except Ham bhī hindū and Bhūrī āṅkheṁ which don’t deal with the Adivasi, the narrator is represented as an outsider who enters the world of the Adivasi in the guise of a visitor134. In Ek duniyā alag sī he takes the shape of a man who, very simply, goes to an Adivasi village where he has an acquaintance. His going there is motivated by an eager curiosity, recall the first line ‘I had a great desire to see an Adivasi village from close range (23)’.135 Similarly, the narrator of Niyomgiri rājā, amazed by discovering that the mountain he sees from the city is the home of the Kondh Adivasi, let himself get involved in an expedition to one of the villages. In other instances he appears as a social worker or a journalist136, as in Bhaginī and Kāṭh cāhie. Whatever reason might bring the narrator to the Adivasi, he always figures as a dikū, belonging to mainstream Hindu society, who entering the world of the Adivasi, has to measure himself with it.

The Adivasi represent ‘the other’, the unknown ‘other’ that attracts and fascinates the narrator in perhaps, a somehow ‘orientalistic’ way, catching the visitor’s curiosity and sympathy137. In fact, he is consistently described as a sympathizer of the Adivasi. His being an outsider brings up a clear relation of contrast between the values and way of thinking of mainstream Hindu society represented by him, and the values and way of thinking of the Adivasi. Luckily, the encounter between the two always appears to be positive. However, despite the good intentions, the ‘other’ is difficult to understand. The mutual incomprehension that arises

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134 The same is actually true for Ham bhī hindū with the difference that the other are the leprosy affected people.
135 merī bahut lālsā thī ki maiṁ ādivāsī gāṁv ko karīb se dekhūṁ.
136 The figure of the journalist gets particular prominence in Bhūrī āṅkheṁ.
137 The sympathy of the narrator is discussed more in details in the next section.
creates moments of embarrassment or in alternative, amazement. The discrepancies between the two worlds are manifested in many instances. In the pseudo-process against Kisun in *Ek duniyā alag sī*, several times the narrator doesn’t understand or even objects the behavior of the Adivasi characters. Recall the moment when the *dalpati* insists on keeping the prisoners bound even if it is absolutely unnecessary, but at the same time he lets them sleep in his bed while he himself sleeps on the ground. In the eyes of the narrator these behaviors, which in reality are attempts to mock his world, are absurd and paradoxical. Similarly, in the scene of *Karkī* bringing eggplants to the neighbor, the incapacity of the latter to interpret that action results in a moment of distress. In *Kāṭh ċāhie* the narrator is puzzled and astonished by the carelessness with which the *Khariā* has wasted all his money, and the contrast between the *Khariā*’s tranquility against the narrator’s agitation gives rise to a brief comical effect. In other situations the narrator is simply unaware of the habits of the Adivasi as in *Bhaginī* when he can’t understand why the young Adivasi isn’t getting married.

Because of this cultural incomprehensibility between Adivasi and non-Adivasi the narrator-visitor needs a guide. The guide who leads the narrator in the world of the ‘other’ is usually himself (or herself) an Adivasi, who is closer to the world of the narrator, and therefore is able to effectively act as a bridge between the two. In *Ek duniyā alag sī* this role is played by *Māṛḍī*, the chief of the village, in *Kāṭh ċāhie* it is *Dāsmātī*, in *Bhaginī* it is *Soren*, and in *Niyomgirī rājā* it is *Bādal* (the only non-Adivasi). The guide is both a language interpreter, translating the language of the Adivasi into Hindi, and a cultural interpreter that sheds light on the behavior of the ‘other’. An example of the first instance is *Māṛḍī* translating the speech of the *dalpati* and the *sarpāṁc* who explain the situation in a language the narrator can’t understand, while *Soren* functions as a cultural interpreter when she explains the cultural reasons that prevent *Bhaginī* to get married. The short story *Karkī* is somewhat different in this respect since the narrator would like to cross the street and enter the world of the ‘other’ but he feels uncomfortable with that and never dares. In that case the distance between the two worlds appears to be even bigger than in the other short stories and the cultural gap even more unbridgeable. It might be argued that here *Karkī*’s husband functions as a kind of guide, explaining their behaviors to the neighbor. However, instead of leading the narrator to the world of the ‘other’, he has to cross the boundary himself in order to communicate with the non-Adivasi.

The character of the narrator as a visitor clearly mirrors the personality of the author. Both his being an outsider and the roles taken up (journalist, social worker) resembles the life
experience of Vinod Kumar (compare section 3.1) Thus, it is safe to argue that the stories contain a strong autobiographical element. However, the narrator shall not be confused with the author. The narrator is a device created by the author to convey what he wants to say. Thus, he is intentionally represented as unacquainted and unexperienced with the Adivasi’s world so that the formative experiences he goes through become the leitmotiv of these short stories and a formative experience for the reader as well.

The stories written in third person are different from the others as they lack the figure of a visitor sympathizing with the Adivasi. The relation between the Adivasi and the dikū takes the shape of a more conflictual clash where the two worlds are represented in an unresolvable war with each other.

4.1.2 The sympathy of the narrator

It has been argued before that the narrator cultivates his sympathy for the Adivasi. Sympathy can be understood in two major senses, either as the sentiment of sorrow for the pain of someone else and a sense of identification with the suffering of other human beings which is an equivalent of compassion, pity, empathy\textsuperscript{138}, solidarity\textsuperscript{139} and the Hindi sahānubhūti (see section 2.3.2) or, more in general, as the affinity, the fellow feeling and compatibility between people\textsuperscript{140}. The narrator of these short stories feels both types of sympathy and also other sentiments, sometimes simultaneously, according to whom he relates himself with.

For instance, towards Karkī, the narrator feels compassion, due to her situation, and apprehension, when he first observes her in the dark night, but also physical attraction. However, towards her husband his feelings are more a combination of sympathy and antipathy, sympathy for his poor condition and his past story of usurped lands but also antipathy due to the enviousness produced by his attraction for Karkī. At the same time, a certain sense of longing to some other, and more interesting form of living than the middle class Indian husband on the other side of the road is inbuilt in the narrative. The feeling of sympathy as pity reappears in Bhaginī even though in a more paternal sense and in fact his preoccupation is due to her remaining unmarried. In this occasion the anxiety of the narrator is made explicit, as the story ends with the narrator worrying about her: “the consolation was that it

\textsuperscript{138} Suzanne Keen in her book Empathy and the novel distinguishes between empathy and sympathy, giving to the first term the sense of a simple “sharing of an appropriate feeling (2007: 4)” and reserving to sympathy alone the sense “supportive emotion (2007: 5)”.

\textsuperscript{139} I borrow this term from Varma (2015), see section 2.3.4.

[the river] would get again brimful with water and overflow. But what about our Bhaginī? (39)”\(^\text{141}\) Also for Karkī the preoccupation takes a concrete form when at a certain point the neighbor states “My heart was filled up with anguish for her (64)”\(^\text{142}\)

Towards the Khariā the feeling of the narrator is more difficult to individuate. It is discussable whether he admires him for his stoicism and cheerfulness despite his poor condition, whether he is envious of his cheerfulness or whether he simply dismisses his behavior, or in alternative all these things together. In Ek duniyā alag sī the narrator manifests a sensual fascination for the woman at the bazar and later on pity for the bound prisoners, but also irony for how the process is arranged. In Niyomgiri rājā there also is a moment of fascination as the narrator reaches the Adivasi village and sees the beautiful adorned Kondh young men and women. For the rest of the short stories the sympathy of the narrator comes from their exploitation, taking again the form of compassion and solidarity.

The narrator often becomes a witness who denounces the injustices carried on against the Adivasi. This is the case in Ek thī enī, Mor, Hīl and of course Budhnī where the abuses are most evident. The main argument of Adivasi criticism is that one can never really tell the pain of another through sahānubhūti. Nevertheless Kumar gives prove to make the pain of the Adivasi his own pain and in certain cases his alter-ego i.e. the narrator as a visitor anguishes even more than the Adivasi. For instance the Khariā and Budhnī don’t seem to be too alarmed for their condition.

Thus, the feelings of the narrator follow basically two lines, either that of compassion/solidarity or that of fascination. In the first case the compassion and solidarity of the narrator is dictated by the different kinds of exploitation perpetuated against the Adivasi while his fascination is derived by a romanticized exoticism that the Adivasi as the ‘other’ represent for him. The latter case comprehends both the erotic fascination for some of the female characters (e.g. Karkī, Salonī, etc.) and also the interest/curiosity towards some extravagant male characters (most notably perhaps the Khariā). Both cases witness a light shade orientalism in an overall realistic representation, where the foreigner represented by the Adivasi positively stimulates the sentiments of the narrator.

\(^{141}\) dilāse kī bāt yah thī mānsūn meṁ vah phir labālab bhar jāegī aur bāndh ko toṛ bah nikalegī. lekin hamārī Bhaginī.

\(^{142}\) merā hrday uske lie vednā se bhar gayā.
4.2 The characters

4.2.1 The exploited and the exploiters

The characters depicted in these collection of short stories can be divided into two broad types: the Adivasi and the non-Adivasi. The Adivasi characters are those that suffer either direct exploitation or the consequences of lands exploitation as well as the intrusion of dikū in their territories. The first case is represented by characters as Enī who is constantly mistreated by her husband and negated hospitalization in the camp because she is an Adivasi. A similar example is Salonī, in Hūl, who is captured, dragged away and raped. Another character to be directly abused in Budnī who is exploited by the contractor, first, and by Raghunāth later on. Likewise, in the short story Mor all the village is victim of exploitation by hand of the king. Some of the characters as Karkī and her husband, and Bhagīnī do not suffer direct aggression and abuse of power but nevertheless they suffer the consequences of land exploitation. For instance, Karkī’s family’s poor condition largely depends by the exploitation of the lands by hand of the traders and her night dreams testify how much she misses that world that land exploitation has destroyed. Similarly Bhagīnī doesn’t get married due to arrival of outsiders that, unlike the Adivasi, practice dowry.

In these cases exploitation is not directly dealt with but it is still present in the background, while its effects on the characters make the theme of the stories. Thus, almost all short stories contain some ecocriticism going hand in hand with the sufferings of the Adivasi. It appears that the degradation of nature or the departure from it often corresponds to a decay of the state of being of the Adivasi characters. This is most evident in the case of Karkī who dreams about her village, and in that of Enī who, sitting in her hospital room, looks out of the window where instead of the courtyard of the hospital she imagines the blue sky, the slope of the mountains, the jungles and the river of her home village as in an open-eyes dream. In Budnī the degradation of the environment in the name of development takes the most dramatic repercussions as the construction of dams result in a decreased level of water in the rivers causing troubles for the farmers, or even in the submersion of entire villages.

It is worth noting that most of the exploited characters are women. Then, at times the exploitation of Adivasi takes a rather feminist approach. In fact, women face a double exploitation, in part for being Adivasi and in part for being women, more or less as it often is the case for Dalit female characters. Some of the abuses against them have a racial fundament but recalling the cases of Enī, Salonī (in Hūl) and Budnī it is hard to distinguish between
ethnicity-based violence and gender-based violence since those committing violence are all non-Adivasi men.

It must be added that not all the Adivasi characters end defeated. A couple of counter examples are found. In Cámdnī rāteṅ the couple at last is able to overcome their problem and Niyomgiri rājā tells about a democratic victory of the Adivasi against the steel company’s pressures.

If on one side there are the exploited characters represented by the Adivasi, on the other side there are the exploiters, usually personified by dikū. In this category fall figures as Enī’s husband, the king in Mor, Kenārīrām (the moneylender) in Hūl, the Hindu missionary in Ĭīs, and all moneylenders, traders and contractors that don’t compare as defined characters but which are anyway mentioned as the cause of land usurpation and exploitation. Thus, to simplify a little it might be argued that the Adivasi stands as the heroes, or the heroines, while the non-Adivasi are most often the villains. However there are some exceptions. For instance the first person-speaking narrator, himself a non-Adivasi, is a supporter of the Adivasi as well as perhaps the Belgian priest in Mor, who defends the Adivasi against the king, even though his intervention might have a hidden purpose i.e. the conversion of the Adivasi. On the contrary, Bhāgvat, the dalpati in Ek duniyā alag sī acts as a negative figure against the two prisoners acting as a police officer. Thus, in that case the division between Adivasi and non-Adivasi becomes less relevant as Bhāgvat, himself an Adivasi, takes up a role usually reserved to non-Adivasi. Similarly Sālkhan in Budhnī is a villager who cooperates with the contractor in order to find a girl to perform at the inauguration of the power station but later on he does not oppose the decision of the panchayat to ban Budhnī from the village.

4.2.2 Accessible vs. inaccessible Adivasi

The Adivasi characters can be further divided between those that are more accessible and those that are less accessible to the narrator. The accessible ones are typically those that in the previous section were defined as guides, talking the language of the narrator and being acquainted with the culture he comes from. The inaccessible characters are those who are culturally most distant from the world of the narrator, with whom he has problems of mutual understanding. These are the quintessence of the ‘other’ for the narrator, and it is mostly these ones that wake his fascination. It is not a case then that the inaccessible characters are those that are described most in detail while the accessible ones are only slightly described, if described at all. Take the case of Bhaginī and Soren for instance. While the former is described in full details, about the latter are only given some few information. Most of figures
in *Ek duniyā alag sī* with their paradoxical behaviors, the *Khariā* in *Kāth cāhie* with his carelessness for earthly goods and money, *Budhī* and of course *Karkī* with her enigmatic behavior and wild beauty are this kind of characters. These characters share some common features. They are usually less educated, less fluent in the language of the narrator, detached or unconcerned about monetary economy and their behavior is perceived by the narrator as extravagant. For these reasons they are less accessible to narrator who strives to create a connection with them and towards which most of his sympathy goes. Yet, despite his tries they remain somewhat enigmatic. Another characteristic often seen in the representation of the inaccessible Adivasi is their close contact with nature. In *Bhaginī* the relation of the young Adivasi and nature is so tight that one needs to understand the surrounding environment in order to catch her charm: “But her charm would be impossible to understand without knowing all the environment. (33)”\(^{143}\) Similarly, in *Niyomgiri rājā* one of the Adivasi encountered on the way to the village is described as forming one unite with the surrounding environment: “He had become one with the nature and the environment to such an extent that he looked like the work of a sculptor (82)”\(^{144}\)

The representation of these characters contains a slightly romanticized image of the ‘other’, witnessing the outsideness of the author. However, it is arguable what is romanticized and what is realistic. For instance, the clumsiness of the villagers mimicking a judicial process might seem an exaggeration but not necessarily, as well as the mindset of the *Khariā* might be interpreted as being stereotyped but not necessarily. In fact, it would be very possible that such scenes as in *Ek duniyā alag sī* and such characters as the *Khariā* might not be only a product of fantasy but things witnessed by the author. In fact, one could very well also think that the dynamics through which *Budhī* is rejected by her village (i.e. after the act of putting the garland around the neck of the prime minister) are a little bit unrealistic but in fact it is exactly what happened. In reality, all short stories are quite plausible and taken, in a way or another, either from historical facts or from the experience of the author. The author’s representation in general is quite realistic even though spotted by elements of romanticism that marks the *otherness* of the so called inaccessible Adivasi. These spots of romanticism appear to be concentrated on the representation of the female characters which is discussed in next section.

\(^{143}\) *lekin bagair pūre pariveś ko jāne is sammohan ko samjhā nahīṁ saktā*.

\(^{144}\) *prakṛt aur pariveś se vah is kadar ekākār ho cukā thā ki ekbāṛī kisī mūrtikār ki kalākṛtī jaīsā lagā*.
4.2.3 The female characters

The female characters have particular relevance in these short stories. They tend to be more romanticized and more victimized than men. Descriptions about the exotic beauty of Adivasi women are found in many passages, sometimes even with a shade of eroticism. The lines describing Salonī who stops on the edge of the forest covered by drops of sweat sparkling like diamonds has been already mentioned as a particularly suggestive example of how the narrator conveys the exotic and eroticized beauty of the Adivasi female character (see section 3.2.5). The Adivasi women are not only described as being beautiful, but also hard working. In some instances the lines depicting women’s hard work, and the sweat produced by it, are used to convey the image of exotic beauty, as if the act of physical working and sweating generated by it would be the key elements in the aesthetics of Adivasi women. Thus, the narrator also refers to an alternative concept of beauty, in which the black skin color is part of the erotic attraction, contrary to the common beauty standards in mainstream Indian society.

Compare the following lines regarding Karkī and Salonī:

**Karkī:**

Karkī was black, but full of charm. Mother of two kids. But her perfectly made body, when working hard bathed in sweat. I saw her many times in the afternoon cutting logs with a hatchet in the courtyard of the house. And at the time of hardworking, the sweat, as the raindrops of October rolled over from her cheeks, neck and waist. Seeing her evoked in me the picture of crimson rose bathing in the dew of the early morning (62).

**Salonī:**

At the time when she was coming back, she was carrying a big load of wood on her head. In the fire of the setting sun all her body was shining as copper. All around her cheeks and navel drops of sweat were sparkling as diamonds. She stopped at one place and helping herself with a tree trunk to support the load, she wiped away the sweat from her neck with the edge of her sari (48-49).
It is striking how the two passages are similar to each other, both exalting with lyrical similes the dark color of their skin and the drops of sweat on their bodies compared with raindrops of October in the former case and diamonds in the latter.

There are other instances where the narrator rather than describing some characters ‘happens’ to gaze at some women standing in the surrounding. Two cases of such instances are particular remarkable. In *Ek duniyā alag sī* the narrator is at the bazar and notices a girl looking at her image reflected in a mirror while sticking a āṭīkā on her brow. A second event is to be found in *Kāṭh cāhie* when he observes bathing women at the riverbank “As if they were assured that nobody was gazing at them or even without caring about it (30-31)”\(^{147}\) This last line also show another feature, i.e. the representation of the Adivasi women’s carefree attitude towards gazes, which in yet other passages is more directly referred to as a complete lack of embarrassment – strongly contrasting the deep and superimposed female sense of shame in mainstream society. In fact when *Salonī* notices that Bhoglā is looking at her it is reported that she smiled unembarrassed “niḥsaṅkoc hams dī (49)”, the same applies, in an even more explicit way, to the moment when Nīmā seduces Enī, “Enī didn’t feel embarrassment. This was against her nature. (72)”\(^{148}\) Thus, it might be argued that the representation of the Adivasi women contains in a particularly strong way that kind of orientalism which tends to depict them as beautiful and hardworking as well as freer from certain taboos regarding relations with men to which mainstream Hindu society’s women are bound.

### 4.3 The settings

The locations of the short stories and the drama are concentrated in the states of Jharkhand and Odisha (see the maps in this section). Three of the short stories take place in the East Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. *Ek duniyā alag sī* is located in *Buṭgorā* (n. 2) a village near Kālikāpur (n. 3), *Kāṭh cāhie* takes place in a unspecified village but the jungle where the Khariā used to live is said to be close to *Potkā Prakhaṇḍ* (n. 4) and the villages in Cāṇḍnī rātem are also unspecified although a mention of Kālikāpur is made, suggesting a nearby location. *Ek thī enī* takes place in the steel city of Bokāro on the banks of the Dāmodar River (n. 5) and Īts in a village near Ranchi and in Ranchi itself (n. 1). *Bhudnī*’s drama revolves around the area of *Panicet* (n. 6), a town close to the border with West Bengal hosting the dam mentioned in the drama. Two stories, *Karkī* and *Niyomgiri rājā*, are located Odisha, the

\(^{147}\) is bāt ke prati āsvast ki kōi unheṁ ghūrkar dekh nahīṁ rahā hai yā phir is bāt ke prati beparvāh rahatīṁ.

\(^{148}\) Enī jherhpī nahīṁ. uske svabhāv ke pratikāl thā yah.
former in an unknown city on the Baitarnī river, and the latter in a city at the feet of the Niyamgiri/Niyomgiri Mountain\textsuperscript{149} and on the mountain itself (n. 7). The rest of the short stories take place in unspecified localities, probably between Jharkhand and West Bengal as mentions of Ranchi and Calcutta often are made.

\textsuperscript{149} In the short story it appears as Niyomgiri in all cases except one where it is spelled as Niyamgiri (lit. ‘Hill of the rules’). In English sources it always appears as Niyamgiri. The author has clarified that the name is Niyamgiri but the Adivasi pronounce it as Niyomgiri (see Appendix 2).
The settings of the short stories are an important part of the representational strategy of the Adivasi. In most cases the geographical settings are the Adivasi villages. The major exception to that are *Karkī* and *Ek thē enē* which take place in cities. The different settings has an impact on the characters. In fact, both the characters of *Karkī* and *Enē* suffer in the cities as it is an environment to which they are unsuited while on the other hand the *Khariā* thrives in the nature, despite his poor condition. The relation between nature and the Adivasi was already mentioned in 4.2.2, taking up the cases of *Bhaginī* and the young Adivasi in *Niyomgiri rājā* who, in the eyes of the narrator, were tightly bound to nature. On the contrary the non-Adivasi visitor finds himself a little bit out of place in the jungle “My friends had gone far. What am I doing in this wilderness? I suddenly ran away from there and stood. *(niyomgiri rājā, 82)*” It seems that the characters and the geographical settings also reflect the romanticized view of the Adivasi as being one with nature in contrast to the non-Adivasi being afraid of or at least foreign to it. The opposite is also true i.e. that the Adivasi can’t thrive outside their environment. However, this applies mostly to the inaccessible Adivasi while the others, e.g. *Rāmdayāl* and *Soren* don’t feel that kind of homesickness felt by *Enē* and *Karkī* exactly because their ‘Adivasiness’ is less pure or in other words it is already contaminated by the *dikū*’s world.

Then it might be argued that while the settings as such are non-fictive and confer the stories an overt realism the ways the Adivasi characters are related to them convey a somewhat hidden romanticism.

4.4 The language

The Hindi of the short stories oscillates between different registers. Passages describing the splendor of nature as well as that of the female characters typically show a more refined style of Hindi often rich of Sanskrit *tatsam*[^151]. On this regard it might be useful to recall and compare the lines describing *Bhaginī* and the Nayamgiri Mountain.

    lālten kī jāduī rośnī memī ghutoṁ ṭak lāl kor sārī se usigdh taruṅāī chalak par rahī thī. [...] bhaginī jab bhī āmkhoṁ ke sāmne gujartī to jangal meṁ khile phūl kī tarah yā phir uddāṁ vegvāṭī nadī kī tarah... (36)

[^150]: *mere sāthī dār nikal gaye the. maiṁ kyā kar rahā hāṁ is biyāvān memī... maiṁ ekbārgī vahāṁ se bhāg kharā hāu.*

[^151]: *tatsam* literary means ‘same as that’. These are Sanskrit loanwords usually used in higher registers of Hindi as well as other MIA languages.
In the magic light of the lantern, from the red-edged sari reaching the knees, her shiny youth was overflowing. [...] Whenever Bhagīṇī crosses the view, she does it as a jungle’s blooming flower or even as an unrestrained swift river.

The use of snigdh tarunāṛ452 (shiny youth) and uddām vegvātī (unrestrained swift) suggests a search for a more elegant way of expression as these terms are not exactly of everyday use. The use of tatsam words is even more widespread in the passage describing the Nayamgiri Mountain:


It looked like a colossal old man resting under the wide open sky. Sublime forehead, nose and chin. On the side his shoulders stretched for a long way. Did nature made it spontaneously, or did man give it that shape to the top of the mountain?

Here the vocabulary consists in great part of Sanskrit tatsam words e.g. virāṭ, vrddh, puruṣ, viśrām, bhavy, lalāṭ, nirmāṇ, prakṛti, anāyās, māṇav, prayās, śikhar, rūp while tadbhav and Persio-Arabic are more rare. The only Persio-Arabic words are āśmān, bagal and bājū.

There are other passages where the style resembles that of high Hindi, as in the depiction of the Kharāṭā:

vah tīs-paintīs varṣ kā yuvak thā. krśakāy śarīr, uljhe hue bāl, malin aur lagbhag tār-tār ho cuke vastr, lekin uske cehre yā pūre vyaktiv se dīntā yā nairāṣya nahīn, balki ek tarah kī praphultātā hī rahī thī (29-30).

He was a young man of 30-35 years. Weak body, tangled hair, dirty and almost teared cloths, but his face and his personality did not suggest humility or despair but rather cheerfulness.

Here again the use of a rather sanskritized vocabulary results in a higher register of Hindi. Moreover, the contrast between his physical aspect i.e. the weak body (krśakāy śarīr), the tangled hair (uljhe hue bāl), the dirty and almost teared cloths (malin aur lagbhag tār-tār ho cuke vastr) and the cheerfulness (praphultātā) of his personality have a quite lyrical effect.

Then, in the passages taken into consideration it is unavoidable to not see a relation between the romanticized depictions of the nature and of the Adivasi and the use of Sanskritized style recalling the highly elevated linguistic and poetical codes of the chāyāvād style (for a brief discussion on the use of Sanskrit tatsam in chāyāvād poetry see Schomer, 1983: 70-75).

452 tarunāṛ is a thadbhav word going back to the Sanskrit taruṇ meaning ‘young, young man’. Although tarunāṛ is not directly taken from Sanskrit (the tatsam word would be tarunatā), it still has a poetic overtone (compare taruṇ in Hindi (A Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages: 325).

53 i.e. tuddhī.
In opposition to a high register of Hindi stands the speech of some of the characters, speaking what might be defined as rural Hindi or in some cases simply broken Hindi. This kind of Hindi is found especially in the dialogues where the ungrammatical, poor Hindi serves the purpose of representing the speech of the characters in a more realistic way. Compare the following extracts from *Ek duniyā alag sī* and *Karkī* where Bhāgvat and Karkī’s husband are speaking.

*Bhāgvat:*

> hamko pulis kā pāvar hai. ham unhem rassī se bāndhkar pīte hue yahāṁ lātā. mukhiyā jī kā ādes hai hamko (26).

We have the power of the police. We bound them with a rope, beat them and brought them here. We have an order from the chief.

The first sentence according to standard Hindi’s rules would rather be ‘hamāre pās pulis kā pāvar hai’ and the form ‘ham unhem ... lātā’ is also grammatically incorrect since the verb is conjugated in the present form whereas it would be expected to be in the past perfect, and in that case together with the ergative construction, i.e. ‘hamne unhem ... lāyā (hai)’. In addition, here and there, there are words that are not exactly standard Hindi: kyūṁ for kyoṁ, ihāṁ for yahāṁ, kaise for kaise, zillā for zilā, hajaur for huzür and the English word jail as jehal. It is discussable what exactly these ungrammatical forms and these words represent. In part it is plausible to think that the ungrammaticality and pronunciation might depend by the fact that Hindi is not the mother tongue of the speaker. However, the forms ihāṁ and kaise are definitely typical for the eastern regional languages of the Hindi belt e.g. Bhojpuri (see Singh, 2009: 90). Thus, the influence of other MIA languages of the eastern provinces might also have an impact on the Hindi spoken there. Compare now *Karkī*’s husband’s speech.

> ‘ham nahiṁ āyā... hamārā purakhā... gorā sahī... relve lāṁ... khetihār jamin par dāurī relve lāṁ... rajī-roṭī kī talāś mēṁ idhar ā gaye. āp jhārkhindī... ham bhī...’

[...]

> ‘phir bāzār ke seṭh ne kaise yah makān banā liyā...?’

> ‘...banā liyā. sarak banne ke būd āyā ek din. bolā kyā karegā itni jamin. bec de. paisā dūngā. bec dī. le gayā blāk āfis ek din. ēr yah makān banā liyā [...]. (65-66)’

> ‘We didn’t come… our ancestors… the white man… railway line… the railway line running on the cultivators’ land… they came here in search of daily bread. You are from Jharkhand… we too. ‘Then how did the traders build this house?’

[...]

> ‘Then how did the traders build this house?’
‘…They built it. After the construction of the road they came one day. They said “what will you do with all this land? Sell it. I will give money” I sold it. Then one day they brought the block office. Then they built this house […]’

This passage is very different from the previous one. Here, except for ‘ham nahin aya’ which in standard Hindi would be ‘ham nahin ae’ there aren’t other ungrammaticalities or words not recognizable as standard Hindi, but from the segmented speech of the character it is still inferable that he has not complete command over his Hindi. Moreover, it is interesting that he uses the English words ‘block office’ suggesting that he has a kind of familiarity with at least some parts of the administrative apparatus.

However, not all Adivasi characters talk in regional or broken Hindi. In fact some of them speak perfectly correct Hindi. These are the cases of for instance Soren, Enĩ and Rāmdayāl. The reason is that these characters are more educated and therefor they are meant to speak more polished Hindi. Recall for instance the brief dialogue between the Soren and the narrator:

*Soren* ne usī gambhirtā se kahā— ‘tum nahin samjhoge. hamāre samaj mein laṛkī ke lie var dūmrīrhe nikalne kā rivāj nahinī. laṛkī kisī ko cun le, yā fir use koī pasand kar rištā māṅgne āye. tabhī hotā āi hai vivāh.’

’yānī, laṛkī ko kisī se prem na ho, yā koī uskā hāth māṅgnā na āye to laṛkī kuṁvārī rah jāye?’

*Soren* thoṛī tiktatā se jabāb diyā— ‘aisā ho saktā hai. hamāre yahāṁ laṛkī parivār ke lie bojī nahinī māṅī jāī. vah to mehnākaś do hāth hai. islie hamāre yahāṁ dahej nahinī caltā, varpakṣ kō hi kanyāṛdaṇ denā partā hai. yah alag bāt kī ab dīkā sanskriti ke prabhav se hamāre yahāṁ bhī dahej kī ummid larkēvāle karne lage hain. is vajah se laṛkī ke vivāh meṃ kathināṛ hone lagī hai’ (36).

*Soren* gravely said— ‘You will not understand. In our society there is no custom that a bridegroom goes looking for a girl. The girl shall choose someone, or if someone likes her he might ask to marry her. Then the marriage will take place’.

‘This means, if a girl does not love someone, or if none come to ask her hand then she will remain unmarried?’

Soren answered with some bitterness— ‘It may be. In our place there is no charge on the family of the girl. She has two good-for-labor hands. That’s why there is no dowry here, it is the bridegroom that has to pay a bride price154. This is a different thing that now due to the influence of the dīkā, here too boys have started to hope for dowry. Because of this the marriage of girls has started to become difficult.

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154 The word *kanyā-dhon* is translated in McGregor’s Hindi-English Dictionary as ‘propriety belonging to a girl before her marriage (165)’ however the context leaves no doubt that here it is meant as ‘bride price’.
Soren proves to be perfectly capable of expressing herself in Hindi. Then, this goes back to the distinction made between accessible and inaccessible characters, with the former knowing better the language of the narrator/visitor and knowing better his cultural background.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the short stories has revealed a number of narrative strategies that the narrator makes use of to convey the representation of the Adivasi and through which his relation to the Adivasi is revealed. The perspective of the author manifests itself in several instances through the figure of the narrator as a visitor. This being a visitor in the world of the Adivasi resembles the life experience of the author. In fact, as the author himself stated much of what the stories tell comes directly from his years-long fieldwork among the Adivasi. Then, it is impossible not to see in the figure of the narrator the same eagerness and passion that moved a young Vinod Kumar to provide service in Adivasi villages in the “Total revolution” movement of the 1970s under the leadership of Jayprakāś Nārāyaṇ (see Metcalf and Metcalf, 2012: 255). However, it has been argued that the author has depicted the narrator as an unacquainted visitor in order to create a dialectic discourse between him and the Adivasi through which convey his message to the readers.

Sympathy is used in the short stories to mold the author’s view on the Adivasi, and to craft the language and the narrative structure of the plots. This sympathy, as has been demonstrated, may take the form of compassion, solidarity and fellowship, and it is enriched by yet other feelings as the romantic fascination for the world of the Adivasi, and in some cases even a certain erotic attraction. The feelings of the narrator are however discrete. They are complex and variegated as much as the Adivasi characters are complex and diverse. Even though the narrator feels pity for the poor Kisun (ek duniyā alag sī) who is beaten and bound, the narrative of the scene operates with an overt irony arising from the mockery of the pseudo-judicial process. In other situations sympathy is generated by a general anxiety coming from the awareness about the irreversible state of some characters (most notably in regard to Bhagnī and Karkī).

It has been argued that the Adivasi characters can be divided between accessible Adivasi and inaccessible Adivasi. To the first group belong those Adivasi whose identity is somehow hybridized through mainstream Hindu society and therefore are more easily accessible by the narrator and non-Adivasi reader. Some of these characters mime Hindu society, accepting its authority but failing in applying it (recall for instance Bhāgvat and the sarpāṇc in Ek duniyā
Due to their hybrid nature such characters often act as guides for the narrator who needs them in order to approach the inaccessible ones. The inaccessible characters are those that fascinates the narrator most, and it is them to be depicted in a slightly more romanticized way.

Despite the overall prerogative of narrative realism, which creates a steady frame for all short stories and the drama, romanticism appears as a kind of visible patina on it. Rather than intentionally stereotyping his characters, the author, presumably unconsciously descends to romanticized depictions born out of his personal fascination for the Adivasi-other which is perhaps most clearly visible in the representation of certain Adivasi women. These somewhat orientalistic representations are nurtured by a higher register of Hindi where the use of a sanskritized style forms lyrical moments inside an otherwise quite journalistic prose. At the opposite pole of sanskritized Hindi there is the rural Hindi of the easternmost part of the Hindi belt and the broken Hindi of those who are most far, although not completely detached, from mainstream society. Then it can be concluded that the different linguistic styles are also used as strategies to convey the image of either the accessible, hybrid Adivasi and that of the inaccessible Adivasi.

Along with language also the different settings are used as strategies of representation. Nature and villages appear to be the natural homes of the Adivasi where they thrive in contrast to the city milieu where they suffer and dream about their lost homes (e.g. Karkī and Enī). Nature and the Adivasi are tightly bound together so that the exploitation of nature and the distance from it is a cause of suffering for the Adivasi. Then it might be said that the settings as well can be used to convey representations that can be either fully realistic or romanticized. Most of the settings are real localities of Jharkhand and Odisha but their description, especially when coming to jungles and mountains are romanticized becoming a part of the Adivasi representation.

However, more in general, it can be discussed how much romanticism there really is in the Adivasi representation. If at on one side the portrayal of several female characters are linked together by the charm of their black skin and freedom from sex taboos then suggesting a certain degree of romanticism and stereotyping, on the other side it is arguable whether the figure of the Khariā with his nonchalance towards money, and that of Karkī bringing the eggplants to the neighbor as well are stereotyped or whether they are realistic. I chose to believe the last two are realistic.
In conclusion, the narrative of Kumar has proven to be a quite successful attempt of realistic narrative on the Adivasi, which his long-lasting experience among them surely enables him to do, albeit some spots of romanticism are also visible. It is exactly these elements of romanticism that reveal his sympathy and attraction towards the Adivasi and from which his outsideness also is revealed.

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Appendix 1: Glossary of Hindi terms

Ādivāsi: lit. ‘original inhabitant’

anubhav: experience

anubhūti: perception, feeling

ārya: Aryan, noble
Appendix 2: Interview with Vinod Kumar (English translation)

When were you born?

I was born on the fifth September 1956.

Where were you born?
There is a state of India, Bihar. I was born in its capital, Patna. My working area has become Jharkhand and now I live in Ranchi the capital of Jharkhand where the majority of Adivasi live.

**Where did you live in your childhood? And what did your parents use to do?**

My father was a functionary in the administrative service. At the beginning he used to be posted in rural areas, later on in cities. He used to be transferred to a new place every three years. My childhood and adolescence passed moving from place to place. Mostly in non-Adivasi areas. In 1974 I was studying for my graduation in a college in Patna, Bihar. During that time the Bihari movement started and I joined it. My life changed direction.

**What is the religious background of your family? Are you religious nowadays?**

My father believed in a social ideology. To my understanding he was atheist. My mother must have been religious, but because of my father she became like him. For example, at times she would fast for the children.

I am atheist. I don’t believe in God. My three children have become atheist. They have no interest in worship.

**How many years did you spend in Poṭkā, Siṁhbhūm and what were you doing there?**

Our political background is the following. We were affiliated to J.P.’s organization in Bihar. J.P. stays for Jayprakash Narayan. In 1974 this organization was active in Bihar against corruption and as a student I took part in it. This organization was begun to oppose the power of Indira Gandhi who later on, for the repression of the organization, announced the state of emergency in the country. She met opposition in the whole country. Then the emergency quit and we had elections. After the elections the government of Indira Gandhi was dissolved. At that time, on incitement of J.P., an organization was created, the Chāṭr Yuvā Saṅgharṣ Vahini. After that Indira Gandhi lost power and J.P. called us to go to the villages and work for the change of the system. Answering to his call I went for the first time to Poṭkā Prakhaṇḍ in the Siṁhbhūm district and I worked there three-four years. We built the Mazdār Kisāṅ Samiti (lit. Labor Farmer Committee) and worked there. ‘Save the jungles’, minimum wage, equal wages etc. were our issues. There I got married and I had children. Then I began to study again. My studies lasted eight-ten years. I took a M.A. degree from Ranchi University. Then I started working in a newspaper and lived in an Adivasi area.
The territory of Jharkhand used to be part of Bihar. In 2000 it got separated from it. Jharkhand is an area with Adivasi majority. At the time of the British rule outsiders started to come in large scale and the Adivasi percentage of the population diminished to 50%. After independence the ratio of the Adivasi population decreased to 26%. The focus of my writing remained the Adivasi societies. In my youth I was impressed by Gandhi and Marx but after living among the Adivasi in Jharkhand I got impressed in Birsā’s\textsuperscript{155} slogan ‘\textit{abuā disom, abuā rāj}’ that is ‘your country, your rule’.

**How did you like working as a journalist?**

At the beginning I liked it a lot. At that time it was all about reading and writing. Authors were allowed to express themselves. However, there has been a slow erosion of the newspapers. The policy of the newspapers has become that of making agreements for getting advertisement. The editors in addition have also started requesting the reporters to collect advertisement. Since I wasn’t disposed to make such kind of agreements I started to get into quarrels with the management and the editor. I was working as a reporter for a daily newspaper in Ranchi, the \textit{Prabhat Khabar} whose editor at the time was Harivansh. He now is Deputy Chairman of the \textit{Rajya-Sabha}\textsuperscript{156}. Then, because of the continuous quarrels and tensions I became disillusioned about mainstream newspapers and I got into the field of literary writing.

**Your stories sound quite autobiographic, how true is it?**

Yes, I am not very creative, my stories arise from the reality that I see or experience. Mostly of my characters are my acquaintances that I mold with a touch of fantasy. For example, \textit{Ek thī Enī} is the story about a young woman who marries a non-Adivasi man. I heard the afflictions of her life and I made a story out of it. Another story is \textit{Hūl}. \textit{Hūl} means revolution. It is the story of the Adivasi resistance against the British that took place around 1850 under the leadership of the Adivasi heroes \textit{Sidho} and \textit{Kānhū} where at least 10.000 people were killed. It is based on historical facts, I only created some of the characters to show the reasons of the revolt. Another story is ‘\textit{Ṭīs}’ which is based on the life of the Adivasi intellectual Dr. \textit{Rāmdayāl Muṇḍā}, which was understood in the context of a conversation with him [unclear in the original], and then I made a story out of it.

\textsuperscript{155} Birsā Muṇḍā was a Adivasi leader. He at the head of the Ulgulān between 1985-1900 (see pages 17-18).

\textsuperscript{156} The upper house of the Indian Parliament.
You are a non-Adivasi who writes about Adivasi, what is the effect, in your opinion, that your being non-Adivasi has on your writing?

In my adolescence I was under the influence of Bengali literature: Tagore, Sarat Chandra and Tarasankar, etc., and I tried to write as they did. When I joined the movement I didn’t write literature. I wrote articles. I did journalism. By living a long time with the Adivasi I made tight relations with them and in this way I could understand their roots and also absorb something. It was easy for me, being a non-Adivasi, to understand from within the life’s philosophy of both societies.

The word dikū. What is the origin of this word? And does it only mean non-Adivasi or is it also deprecative?

After the British came non-Adivasi entered the territories of the Adivasi. There they brought into force the zamindari system. The zamindar came, governmental agents came, and contractors came. Those people exploited and oppressed the Adivasi. The Adivasi called them dikū first. dikū that is dik, dik karne valā, trouble maker. But with the time this word received the meaning of ‘outsider’ only, non-Adivasi.

In this word there isn’t only dispraise, but it contains a profound aversion imprinted in it.

There is a story ‘Niyomgiri rājā’. Niyomgiri at certain points is spelled Niyamgiri, why is it so?

Niyamgiri is the name of a mountain chain where the Ḍoṃgriyā Kaundh and other Adivasi communities live. They pronounce Niyamgiri as Niyomgiri. They believe Niyomgiri to be their king, their god. Therefore the name of the story is Niyomgiri rājā but here and there it is also written Niyamgiri.

The main character of the story Kāṭh cāhie is a Kaundh Adivasi, right? Is he invented or real?

He is not a Kaundh Adivasi, but a real character of the Sabar community living on the mountains of Jharkhand. I met him 40 years ago, when I was living in Poṭkā.

Is the accident occurring in Ek duniyā alag sī based on a real experience or is it the product of imagination?

There is very little imagination in my stories. Ek duniyā alag sī is based on my first days when I just arrived in the Adivasi area and I lived with my friend Kumār Candr Mārdī’s
house in *Pōtkā*. At that time I was involved in the work for the struggle organization. Thereafter, I made use of my memories and experiences in my literary writings.

The cover of my collection of short stories is that house, where I arrived forty years ago after much wandering and lived in the room on the left corner with my friend *Māṛḍī*. In that house were also living *Māṛḍī’s* sister-in-law and sister, and also his niece. In Hindi, the sister’s daughter is called *bhaginī*. The story *Bhaginī* is taken from the memories of those days. By living in the house of *Māṛḍī* I understood from close range the Adivasi life and I assimilated their noble roots – the harmony, the collectivity, the simplicity and virtue. That house is now still the same… Still today I have an intimate relation to that house.

Appendix 3: Interview with Vinod Kumar (Hindi)

*āpkī paidāiś kis san mere huī?*

mere janm tithi: 5 sitambar 1956.

*āpkī paidāiś kahāṁ kī hai?*

Bhārat kā ek rājya hai bhīr. uskī rājdhānī Paṭnāh mere merā janm huā. vaise merē karmsthalī Jhārkhaṇḍ ban gaṛ aur ab main ādīvāsī bahul Jhārkhaṇḍ rājya kī rājdhānī Rāṁcī mere rahtā hūṁ.

*apne bacpan mere āp kahāṁ rahe? aur āpkī māṭā-pitā kī karte the?*

mere pitā praśāsanik sevā ke ek ādhikārī the. śuruatī dinorī mere Bihār ke grāmīṁ ilākoṁ mere unkī postīṅg huā kartī thī, phir śaharoṁ mere. har āṁ varṁ mere unkī śrāṅfār ho jāṭā thā kisi nāī jagah. to merā bacpan aur kīśorāvāsthā unke sāth jagah-jagah ghūṁte bītā. jyādātar gair-ādīvāsī ilākoṁ mere. san ’74 mere Bihār kī rājdhānī Paṭnāh ke ek kālej mere maiṁ graijūēsan kar rāhā thā. usī daurān Bihār āndolan śūrū huā aur maiṁ usmēṁ śāmil ho gayā. mere jīvaṁ kī diśā badal gaṛ.

*āpke parivār kā dharmik baṅkrāuṇḍ kī kā hai? aur kāy āp ājkal dharmik haiṁ?*

mere pitā saṁājvādī vicārdhārā ko mānte the. merē samajh se ve nāstik rahe haiṁ. merē māṁ dhārmik rahī hogī, lekin pitā ke prabhāv mere unkī tarah hī ban gaṛ. vaise, vah baccom kī lie kabhī-kabhī vrat-upvās kartī thī.

maiṁ khud ko nāstik mānte huṁ. tśvar mere merē āṭhā nahīṁ. mere tīnom bacce bḥī nāstik ban gaye haiṁ. pūjā pāṭh mere unkī dilcaspī nahīṁ.
अप्र सिम्बुम के पोङके में लिट साल राह उर वहांम राह कर क्या कार्टे हें?

हम लोगों का पोलिटिकल बाईक्रान्द यह है, हम बिहार के J.P. अंदोलन से जुड़े होते हैं। J.P. यानि, जयप्रकाश नारायण। बिहार में यह अंदोलन भ्रष्टाचार के कलाफ़ 1974 में लगभग तीन वर्ष रहने के लिए इतने मुश्किल है। यह अंदोलन इंदिरा गांधी की सातों में धृतिशील भुना है। आपके द्वारा इन्हें आदर के लिए देना के लिए देश में इमरजान्सी करने का उद्देश्य है। इस प्रकार आपके लिए इस प्रेस को आश्चर्य और ज्वालमुखी करने के लिए आम लोगों की अप्रत्येकण है।

इंदिरा गांधी की अप्रत्येकण है। इंदिरा गांधी की अप्रत्येकण है।

जहर्कान्द का इलाका ख़रेबो बिहार में ही शामल ठाँ। सन 2000 में बिहार से आलग हो कर जहर्कान्द बनाया। जहर्कान्द एवं पाहुल इलाका है। अत्यधिकत ज्यामित का प्रावृष्ट बढ़े पाईमाने पर सुरु हो गया है ते ग्हाट के लगभग 50 फिसाड़ रह गये थे। एस-डी के बाद एवं पाहुली बढ़ने का आनुपात ग्हात कर 26 फिसाड़ रह गया है। मेरे लक्षण का केन्द्र एवं पाहुली समाज ही रहना। मैंने अपने युवावस्था में गांधी और मार्क्स के पर्यावरण से प्रभावित था। लेकिन जहर्कान्द के एवं पाहुलीयों के बीस स्थाने बिहार के ‘अबू दिसम, अबू राज’ यानी ‘अपने देश में अपना राज का’ से प्रभावित होता लाल गया।

पट्रकारिता का कम कासा लगाय?

सुरूली दाँ राँग में पट्रकारिता का कम बहुत आचार लगाया। उस वक्त लिख्ने-पार्हने का व्‌तावरण था। लेखकों की अधिव्यक्ति के चुट थी। लेखन धीरे-धीरे पट्रकारिता के उस दाँ राँग संस्था बहुत गया। विज्ञापनों के लिए समाज उपकरण अखबारों की नीति बन गई और रिपोर्टरों को विज्ञापन जुटाने का कम भी अतिरिक्त रूप से करने के लिए सम्पादकों द्वारा कहाँ जाने लगाया। उन्नति मिम्म इस तरह के समाजहारे करने के लिए मानसिक रूप से पालिका नहीं था, इसलिए अखबार प्रबंधन अन सम्पादक के तहद होने लगा। मैंने रामचंद्र शा प्रकाशित गन्त प्रभाव हबर’ में रिपोर्टर के लिए एक मंगलत सम्पादक उस वक्त हरिवालि हुआ होता है। वे जले कर राज्यासाब्ध से पुष्पायक्ष हो गये हुई। तो, लगातार तहद वा नाना के दाँ राँग से गुजरते हैं।
mukhyadhrā kā pratkārita se moh-bhaṅg hotā gayā aur maṁ sāhitya lekhan ke kṣetra meṁ utar ayā.

āpikā kahāniyāṁ kāfi ātmakathātmak lagtī hain. yah kitnā sahī hain?

hāṁ, maṁ bahut zyādā kalpanāśīl nahīṁ, meṛī kahāniyāṁ yā upanyās bhoge-dekhe yathārth se niklī hain. adhikatar pāṭṛ mere jāne-pahcāne hainṛ jīnṝh meṛī thōṛā bahut kalpna ke puṭ ke sāth mairīne gaṛhā hain. jaise, ‘Ek thī Eṇī’ kī kahānī ek ādivāśī yuvatī kī kahānī hai jo ek gair-ādivāśī ādmī se vivāh kartī hain. uske jīvan kī bhogī huī yātnāem meṛī sunī hain aur use hī kahānī ke rūp meṁ pāṭhkom ke sāmne rakh diyā hain. ek kahānī ‘hūl’ hain. hūl yānī krānti. ādivāśī nāyak Sidho Kānhū ke neṭṛṭva meṁ 1850 ke āspās arigrezoṁ ke khilāf ādivāsiyōṁ ke vidroh kī kahānī jis vidroh meṁ kam se kam das hazār log māre gaye the. vah aitihāsik tathyaṁ par ādhārit hai, bas vidroh ke kāraṇom ko darśāne ke lie kuch pātrom ke nirmāṇ meṁ kalpna kā sahārā liyā gayā. ek kahānī ‘ṭis’ hain jo ādivāśī buddhiyī Śī. Rāmdayāl Muṇḍā jī kī jīvan ke anubhavon par ādhārit hai jise unse bāṭcī ḍi kā meṁ jānā thā [sic] aur bād meṁ ke kahānī kā rūp diyā.

āp gair-ādivāśī hain jo ādivāśī ke bāre meṁ likhte hain, to āpe khayāl se gair-ādivāśī hone kā kyā pariṇāṁ hain āpe lekhan meṁ?

apne kīśorāvasthā meṁ Baṅgla sāhitya – Rāvindranāth Ṭaigor, Śarat Candr, Tārāśnkar – ādi ke prabhav meṁ rahā aur un jaisā hī likhne kī kōśī kartā. āndolan meṁ śāmīl hone ke bād sāhitya lekhan nahīṁ rahā. lekh ādi likhā karta thā pratrakāritā karta rahā. ādivāśī samāj ke sāth ghaniṣṭ riśtoṁ aur lambe sāth [sic] kī vajah se maṁ unke jīvan mūliyorōṁ ko samajh sakā aur kuch-kuch ātmasāt bhī kar sakā. gair ādivāśī hone kī vajah se maṁ donor samāj ke jīvan darśān ke antar ko samajhne meṁ mujhe āsānī hui.

śabd dikū, is śabd kā utpatti kyā hai? aur kyā uskā matlab sirf gair-ādivāśī hai yā vah nindāśucak bhī hain?

arigrezoṁ ke āne ke bād ādivāśī ilākoṁ meṁ gair-ādivāsiyōṁ kā praveś huā. unhuṁne vahāṁ jāmīndāṛī prathā lāgpū kī. jāmīndā āye, sarkāṛī kārīnde āye, țekēdāroṁ kī praveś huā. un logoṁ ne ādivāsiyōṁ kā akūt [sic] șoṣan aur utpūrṇ kiyā. ādivāśī pahle unheṁ hī dikū kahte the. dikū yānī dik, dik karne vālā, pāreśān karne vālā. lekin kalāntar meṁ yah śabd bahirāgatōṁ kī le, gair-ādivāśī māṭr ke lie rūṛḥ ho gayā hain.

is śabd meṁ sirf nindā nahīṁ, gahrī ghraṇā bhī chipī huī hain.
ek kahānī hai ‘Niyomgiri rājā’. usmēṁ kahīṁ kahīṁ Niyomgiri ko Niyamgiri likhā gayā hai. iskī vajah?

Niyamgiri ek parvat śṛṅkhālā kā nāṁ hai jahāṁ Dongriyā Kaundh aur anya ādivāśī jātiyāṁ raḥtī haiṁ. ve Niyamgiri ko ‘Niyomgiri’ ke rūp meṁ uccārit karte haiṁ. ve Niyomgiri ko apnā rājā, bhagvān mānte haiṁ. islie kahānī kā nāṁ to unkī bhaṅgimā meṁ ‘Niyomgiri rājā’ rakhā gayā hai lekin Niyamgiri bhī jahāṁ tahāṁ likhā gayā hai.

‘Kāth cāhie’ kahānī kā mukhya pātr ek Kaundh ādivāśī hai? vah pātr kalpit hai yā vāstvik?

vah Kaundh ādivāśī nahīṁ, balki Jhārkhaṇḍ ke pahāroṁ par rahne vāle sabar jātī kā ek vāstavīk pātr hai. usse maiṁī cālīs varṣ paḥle milā thā, jab maiṁ Poṭkā meṁ rahtā thā.

‘Ek duniyā alag sī’ kahānī kī ghaṭṇā kyā āpke yathārtha anubhav par ādhārit hai yā kālpāni?

merī kālpāni kahāniyāṁ bahut kam haiṁ. ‘Ek duniyā alag sī’ mere un dinōṁ ke anubhav par ādhārit hai jab maiṁ ādivāśī ilāke meṁ nayā-nayā gayā thā aur apne mitr Kumār Candr Māṛḍī ke Godgrām, Poṭkā, sthit ghar meṁ rāhā kartā thāa. un dinōṁ maiṁ saṅgāthan saṅghṛṣ ke kāṁ se jurā thā. bād meṁ un smṛtiyōṁ-anubhavom kā maiṁīn sāhitya lekhan meṁ upayog kiyā.

mere kahānī saṅgrah kā kavar vah ghar hai, jahāṁ maiṁī cālīs varṣ paḥle ek din bhaṭakte-bhaṭakte pahurīc gayā thā aur jiske bāyeṁ kone vāle kamre meṁ maiṁī rāhā kartā thāa apne mitr Māṛḍī ke sāth. us ghar meṁ Māṛḍī ke bhaiyā-bhābhī aur bahanem raḥtī thī aur raḥtī thī unke ek bahan kī beṭī. hindī meṁ bahan kī beṭī ko bhaginī kahte haiṁ. ‘bhaginī’ kahānī unhiṁ dinōṁ kī smṛtiyōṁ kī kahānī hai. Māṛḍī ke us ghar meṁ rah kar hī maiṁīn ādivāśī jīvan ko karīb se dekhā samjhā thāa aur unke jīvan ke udātt jīvan muliyoṁ -samatā, sāmūhiṅkātā, sādagī aur sadācār – ko ātmasāt kar sakā thā. vah ghar ab bhī jas kā tas hai... us ghar se āj bhī merā ātmīya rīśtā hai.