SUBALTERN SOCIAL MOVEMENT LEARNING AND THE DECOLONIZATION OF SPACE IN INDIA[1]

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INTRODUCTION

> We fought the British thinking that we will be equal in the independent India. There will be land settlement, for instance—but the *savarnas* (upper castes) and the rich people have controlled (*akthiar*) the land, including *Adivasi* (original dwellers) land. Today, they are at the center of wealth and *rajnithi* (politics). It is going to be a stupendous task to try and remove them (stated in the dominant Oriya language as *toleiba* or likened to an attempt at removing a massive boulder/rock from the pathway).
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> Kondh *Adivasi* elder from a village in South Orissa.

> Even today you will find there is not enough cultivable land available for our people because they have taken it away… They have the power of *dhana* (wealth) and *astro-shastro* (armaments). They have the power of *kruthrima ain* (of artificial laws and rules)—they created these laws just to maintain their own interests. … and where we live, they call this area *adhusith* (or *Adivasi* infested, pejoratively understood as "pest-infestation")… we are condemned to the life of *ananta paapi* (eternal sinners), as *colonkitha* (dirty/black/stained), as g*hruniya* (despised and hated).
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> *Adivasi* leader of the people's movement organization, *Adivasi-Dalit Ekta Abhijan* (ADEA), in South Orissa.

These words of an *Adivasi* elder and a leader of the people's organization or ADEA, representing some 21,000 Scheduled tribes (ST)[2] and peoples located in 120 villages in south Orissa (east coast state in India), make it abundantly clear that anti-colonial nationalist movements fail to represent and address the interests of all social groups in a territory contesting colonial occupation. More significantly, the exercise of colonial relations is not exclusive to the "outside-inside" country/peoples binary but some version is reproduced from "within" (or in "inside-inside" relations);

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[2]Constitutionally recognized (scheduled) groups for ameliorative purposes.

a phenomenon first alluded to in the 1960s by Mexican sociologists, Pablo Casanova and Rodolfo Stavenhagen as "internal colonialism" (cited in Mignolo, 2000, p. 104), when accounting for the new relationship between a recently independent Mexican state and its Amerindian population. The dismantling of British colonial rule in India did not, then, simply translate into freedom from political-economic and psycho-cultural oppression and caste-race discrimination for the *Adivasi*. The *Adivasi* continue to experience what Walter Mignolo (2000, p. 7) referred to as the "colonial difference" and the "coloniality of power," as the Indian state simultaneously works to establish alliances with metropolitan colonial powers while employing a colonial politics towards *Adivasi* and forest communities (Shiva, 1991) who are, by definition of the Indian state, citizens of India.

The indigenous peoples of Asia do not have the same recognition as indigenous peoples in North America, Australia, or New Zealand, even though 70% of the world's indigenous peoples live in Asia (IFAD, 2000/01), while some 80 million (almost twice the number that live in the entire Americas) or more *Adivasis* are currently located in India (as per the 2001 census). As Barnes, Gray, and Kingsbury acknowledged in their book on Indigenous peoples of Asia (1995, p. 2), "Indigenous peoples, a category that first came into existence as a reaction to the legacy of Western European colonialism, has proven especially problematic in postcolonial Asia, where many governments refuse to recognize the distinction sometimes advanced by dissident ethnic groups between indigenous and nonindigenous populations."The politics of recognition and definition aside, defining indigenous is a somewhat ambiguous affair in the Asian context, as Asia has experienced different waves of migration and multiple colonizations, as has India. One ethnic group may have longer-standing claims than another without actually being the original inhabitants of an area. Thus, indigenous peoples are often defined as prior rather than original inhabitants (or *Adivasi*). For the purposes of this paper, the Sanskrit term *Adivasi* (original dweller) will suffice as the communities concerned define themselves as such (self-declared) and also make references to themselves as "mulo nivasi" or "root people."

Prompted by the author's experience as a participant in an organized partnership with *Adivasis* in south Orissa since the early 1990s; Gayatri Spivak's intimation that the "subaltern can not speak" (Spivak, 1988) [and the "theoretical asphyxiation" of a subaltern politics ably contested in Parry's work as a "deliberate deafness to the native voice where it can be heard" (1987, p. 39)]; Dirlik's (1994) pertinent assertion that postcolonial theory reduces the material relations of colonial power to the rules of

language (colonial discourse analysis); and the praxiological possibilities encouraged by a Gramscian-strain of subaltern studies (Sarkar, 2005), this paper will address subaltern agency as expressed through social movement learning and the decolonization of physical/material space (land and forests in particular) in *Adivasi* contexts in south Orissa. Relying on data and associated reflections on emergent themes and understandings generated from researching "learning in *Adivasi* social movements" (research that commenced in 2006), this paper will (a) address the methodological orientation of the research; (b) briefly elaborate on the colonization of land and forest spaces in *Adivasi* contexts; (c) examine social movement learning, specifically in relation to the issues and purposes of the movement and how learning contributes to the establishment of purpose, while providing some of the impetus for *Adivasi* agency in relation to the decolonization of these spaces; and (d) selectively engage theoretical considerations pertaining to radical adult education/learning and subaltern perspectives on learning in *Adivasi* movements.

RESEARCHING LEARNING IN *ADIVASI* SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: A PARTICIPATORY CASE STUDY

Learning in struggle (Foley, 1999), including social movements as a form of struggle (Cunningham, 2000; Holst, 2002; Mayo, 2004), is the object of research and praxis given the renewed interest in social movements as agents of political-economic and cultural change (Carroll, 1997; Evans, Goodman, & Lansbury, 2002; Polet & CETRI, 2004; Starr, 2000). Resistance, as a form of struggle and/or social movement, has also captured the interest of scholar-activists (Amoore, 2005; Bargh, 2007), especially in relation to the increasing penetrations and emasculations being produced by the contemporary and re-constituted colonialist project of neoliberalism which, like prior colonial impositions, demonstrates little regard for ecological and social boundaries and limits (Gedicks, 1994; Hossay, 2006; Madeley, 2000; Paul & Steinbrecher, 2003).

The relative absence of studies concerning knowledge and learning in indigenous movements in general or more specifically, learning in indigenous movements in recently independent countries/regions or learning in *Adivasi* movements in eastern India in particular (movement scholars like Shah, 2004, p. 108, have referred to the paucity of any kind of movement scholarship in the eastern states) has partially prompted the need for this research into learning in *Adivasi* social movements in the east coast state of Orissa. Furthermore, scholarship pertaining to indigenous move-

ments and peoples in India seldom, if ever, moves from the assumption that *Adivasis* are indeed agents and architects of their own learning and social processes (Chacko, 2005) and continue to anthropologize the native as an inert object of study and analysis in a colonial project of assessment, taxonomy, and assimilation. This study also derives its pertinence from the possibility that the dominant adult education scholarship on movements/struggles in India[3] continues to rely on statist and market-based perspectives with little regard for or attention to *Adivasi* agency/ways, despite the state and the market. Most movement/learning studies examine past movements and rely on secondary documentation/research. This study is embedded in a current movement and relies on primary research pertaining to learning in *Adivasi* social movements in the state of Orissa in eastern India.

As jointly discussed with the people's movement or ADEA, one of three areas of inquiry being addressed by this research in phase one pertains to learning and the definition of the purpose of this *Adivasi* movement in south Orissa. Specifically, (a) What are the issues being faced by *Adivasis*? In relation to these issues, what are some of the apparent purposes of the ADEA movement? (b) How does learning contribute towards defining these purposes and their subsequent achievement? This paper elaborates on this aspect of the research as emergent themes suggest an *Adivasi* politics and learning pertaining to a preservation of *Adivasi* ways and material spaces (specifically, land and forest) and a continual quest for subaltern unity.

Research methods are predicated upon the centrality of *Adivasi* agency and participation in a research partnership that seeks to explore and address questions that are of significance to the movement and outside researcher/interests. What determines the feasibility of such a relationship is the long-term association of the researcher with the partner research communities and the ADEA since the early 1990s. While indigenous groups in settler societies of North America or Australia and New Zealand are increasingly speaking through indigenous academics/researchers, the same is not true for the *Adivasi* who still have to rely on outside researchers to represent and amplify their perspectives and issues, continually risking the possibility of being negated by a politics of mis/representation in research endeavors such as this. However, given the long -term relationship (over a decade now) between the partners engaged in this research endeavor, the likelihood of such distortions is perhaps, of limited concern.

[3]See Indian Journal of Adult Education, 2002 or Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Draft National Policy on Tribals, November 8, 2005 or Tandon, 2000.

The research employs a combination of what Linda Tuhiwai-Smith in *Decolonizing Methodologies* referred to as a "strategy of consultation where efforts are made to seek support and consent" from the *Adivasis* and a "strategy of making space" where the research process consciously brings more *Adivasi* "researchers and voices" into the research process (Smith, 1999, p. 177). Graham Smith's (1992) proposed model of power sharing where the researchers seek the assistance of the community to meaningfully support the development of a research enterprise that seeks to be of some benefit to the community, also captures a dimension of the methodological approach to the study. Subsequently, at the time of determining the prospects for this study, the ADEA and the researcher discussed ways in which this research would benefit the communities including the development of a community research sharing newsletter called Arkatha (our talk), which is an avenue for popular dissemination of research results; working with a team of community-based (*Adivasi*) research assistants; recognition in-kind of community and ADEA participation in the research through contributions to community grain banks (an emergency food supply for *Adivasis* living in a drought-prone area subject to conditions of starvation and extreme forms of material deprivation); the opportunity to speak to the "world" and to particular agents of development (e.g., voluntary development NGOs) about their issues and positions (including knowledge sharing engagements); respect for *Adivasi* cultural forms (e.g., narratives, song, and poetry) of articulation in the research process; community and/or ADEA participation in researching questions of particular interest to the movement; and associating the research with and voluntarily contributing towards the newly created people's Center for Research and Development Solidarity (CRDS).

Given these broader understandings, the research methodology is a combination of participatory indigenous approaches (Smith, 1999) and an exploratory intrinsic case study approach that seeks "first time knowledge" about learning in the *Adivasi* movement context, defined by its "particularity" and the interest in "telling the stories of those living the case" (Stake, 2000, p. 437) or the *Adivasis*. The "case" is "bound" (Stake, 2000, p. 436) by its reference to a particular community (primarily Kondh *Adivasis*), located in a proximate space with a defined population group (a purposive sample of 12 villages in one panchayat/local administrative unit or the regional wing of a 120-village movement organization) and an evolving process or phenomena (e.g., learning in this *Adivasi* movement). The adopted case study approach is descriptive to the extent necessary to begin to address the proposed research questions (as opposed to being an exhaustive eth-

nographic case seeking socio-cultural thick description) in order to minimize research intrusiveness.

The research is being carried out with a gender-balanced team of six community-based research assistants (RAs), all of whom belong to the communities of the ADEA and the author as principal investigator (PI). The team has worked on similar research initiatives with the PI in the past and are familiar with "doing research." Data sets have been and are being developed around "mini research projects" defined by the team, often in conjunction with representatives of the ADEA leadership or specific village communities facing pressing issues being addressed by the movement. Some examples include (a) tapes/notes on ADEA leadership gatherings on four occasions (day-long sessions); (b) a five-village case study pertaining to land and forest struggle as a microcosm of the broader struggle of the ADEA [employing interviews with key informants (e.g., elders); village gatherings as "focus groups"; participant observation in ceremonies celebrating *Adivasi* assertions and historic struggles; observation of critical incidents, later shared and discussed/analyzed with concerned communities; documents, such as community or state land records etc.]; and (c) collection and discussion of poetry, laments, narrations, and oral renditions with implications for movement issues/concerns. The PI's participation in data-gathering occasions is selective and determined in accordance with the need for such support, as the team takes on increasing responsibility for the research process in/with the communities. Research methods (including the ethics and politics of "doing research") are discussed before, during, and after "mini research projects." The PI plays a more significant role in this forum and dramatizations, re-creations, and role plays (e.g., of varieties of interviewing/dialogical processes "with a purpose") are often used to decipher what it is that we are doing in the name of research. The enthusiasm has been infectious and as one RA relatively new to our research relationship put it, "I thought research means doing surveys and getting people to share personal information about them self that the government will use on them—statistical stuff that they bother the people about all the time but nothing changes for our communities. But this, what you are sharing with us, is about us and about the people—it is our way. If this is research, then I am with you!"

Data consist of observation and interview notes, diagrammatic and pictorial representations, and taped songs/poetry and narrations, copies of which are given to the communities when such requests have been forthcoming. Data are either in Kui (Kondh *Adivasi* dialect) or Oriya (dominant state language) and are translated by the team (including the PI)

into English. Three members of the team are proficient in Kui, Oriya, and English and play a significant role around discussions concerning translations. English versions are subjected to discussion and "correction" by the team and when necessary, re-engaged with the community/groups concerned for advice and accuracy of interpretations. Similarly, data analysed by the team for patterns and emergent themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) are subject to member checks when necessary and analysed on a regular rotation to ensure that when saturation points are reached, "when new data is redundant with previously collected data" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 62), data collection on that front is brought to a close. Whenever necessary, as in instances where the team is "uncomfortable with analytical interpretations" being made by the group, the data and participants are revisited and re-engaged. Whenever possible, data are jointly analysed with the village communities or participants (like the ADEA leadership), as in the case of analysis of laments or narratives or of observations around ritual and ceremony. Issues of trustworthiness of data and emergent reflections are important to the extent that representations are not a distortion/mis-representation of participant constructions and have catalytic validity (Lather, 1993) or some utility for the movement. To this end, triangulation informs the approach here given the emphasis on the use of multiple investigators, data sources, and collection methods to confirm emergent findings. Member checks and joint analysis of data enhance the plausibility of interpretations.

THE COLONIZATION OF LAND AND FORESTS IN *ADIVASI* CONTEXTS

According to the Indigenous World reports produced by the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) and reports from the UN's Working group on Indigenous Populations, "problems faced by indigenous peoples of Asia (with considerable overlap in other regions as well) include plundering of resources; forced relocation; cultural genocide; militarization; forced integration of indigenous peoples into market economies; and bigotry and discrimination" (Eversole, McNeish, & Cimadamore, 2005, p. 32). As is evident from what is being gleaned by this research into learning in *Adivasi* movements, there is much in this observation that applies to the *Adivasis* of the state of Orissa where over 80% of the population live in 57,000 villages. Some eight million *Adivasis* belonging to 62 different tribes (STs) currently reside in the villages of Orissa (eastern seaboard of India), mostly in the hilly eastern ghats region. The Kondh, Saora,

and Domb scheduled groups are those that are pertinent to this research and are located in the mineral and timber rich hills of southern Orissa. The tribes rely primarily on shifting cultivation, horticulture, animal husbandry, the collection and sale of minor forest products and seasonal work on government construction sites (or as migratory labor) for their living. The land and forests are not just economic assets with material significance but are of great cultural and spiritual significance, a point that is often overlooked or disregarded by state/outside interests (Behura & Panigrahi, 2006).

The Britishers first restricted customary rights of the tribals over land and forests in 1855. The Indian Forest Act of 1878, of 1927, and then the Government of India Act of 1935 successively consolidated the power of the imperial government over forests and emphasized the revenue yield aspects and the resource requirements of British military, commercial, and industrial sectors. During 200 years of colonial rule, the British brought changes in land use patterns (e.g., opening up of tribal areas to outsiders through improved communications); exploited forest resources and mineral ores and introduced cash crops, thus distorting the land structure, ecology, forest resources, and flora and fauna with grave implications for the *Adivasis* (Behura & Panigrahi, 2006, p. 35). British colonial rule began the process of detribalization of tribal land and forests, whereby the various Forest and Land Acts reduced the tribal to the status of encroachers on their own territories. This process was met with determined tribal resistance and rebellion (including the Chota Nagpur, Munda, Kol, Santal, and Rampha rebellions), which did result in acts of amelioration and legislative measures to recognize some tribal rights.

The post-independence scenario in the form of the Forest Policy of 1952 was the reiteration of bureaucratic management of forests and the promotion of State Capitalism in the forest sector, a major reason for continued unrest in *Adivasi* areas in Orissa and elsewhere (Rath, 2006). According to a report of the Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) (2005, pp. 4-5), despite Constitutional Provisions in the 5th and 6th Schedules that recognize tribal ownership rights over land and forests in Scheduled/protected Areas, "contradictory legal provisions and failure to implement or translate Constitutional Provisions into reality" undermine these rights of *Adivasis*. For example, forest laws that confer "usufruct rights" to use minor forest products without right to ownership and subject to a "whimsical no damage to the forest" determination by forest officials contradict the ownership rights provisions of the 5th Schedule.

Under the Forest Conservation Act (1980), the Wild Life (Protection) Act (1972), and the Land Acquisition Act (1894/pre-independence), "The

government has the sovereign right to evict people for undefined public interest or 'larger interest' but the affected people do not have the right to question the decision of the government on forceable evictions" (ACHR, 2005 ,p. 9). In fact, the Land Acquisition Act, which has been instrumental in the eviction of tribal peoples for more than a century, has no provision for resettlement and rehabilitation, not to mention right to free, prior, and informed consent (contrary to an ILO Convention to which India is a signatory).

In their analysis of neoliberal impacts on land policies and processes of land alienation, Pimple and Sethi (2005, p. 239) concluded that "under the application of neoliberal land policies . . . traditional occupiers of land under customary law confront the prospect and reality of becoming illegal encroachers on land they have cultivated and sustained for generations—they are vulnerable and subject to summary eviction."They identified several strategies employed by the neoliberal state towards the detribalization of land and forests including: by reservation (originally practiced by the British in the 1800s), leasing of land to industrialists, the activation of a Wild Life Protection Act that defines the "tribal as the enemy of ecology and the outsider/environmentalist as protector" (Pimple & Sethi, 2005, p. 242) and demarcations of land/forests for national parks and sanctuaries which exclude the tribals from these protected zones.

It is not surprising to learn, then, that while *Adivasis* constitute 8% of the Indian population, they account for 40% of "displaced persons" and in Orissa, where *Adivasis* make up 22% of the population, they account for 42% of "displaced persons" (Fernandes, 2006). Since the New Economic Policy of 1991 (neoliberal policy prescriptions to marketize, privatize, and open up the Indian economy to foreign direct ownership/investment—mining is a case in point where 100% foreign ownership is permitted), over 95% of mining activities (e.g., Bauxite) alone are on *Adivasi* lands while, according to official figures, some 500,000 plus people in Orissa have been displaced by state-corporate "development" between 1951-1995 (Behura & Panigrahi, pp. 203, 211). Meanwhile, according to some conservative estimates, 24,124 hectares of land (up until 1999) have been deforested as a result of development projects in tribal areas including dams, mines, roads, railways, and new industry (Behura & Panigrahi, 2006, p. 37). While official surveys suggest that over a third of tribals are landless in Orissa (Behura & Panigrahi, 2006, p. 192), 80% or more families are landless (as per the official definition) in the ADEA region.

The post-independence scenario has witnessed the continued victimization of *Adivasis* through a "systematic process of exploitation, which has

marginalized and impoverished them. … State policies on land and land-based resources instead of encouraging the tribals have depressed them and opened up the tribal economy for others to exploit" (Behura & Panigrahi, 2006, p. 209). Such processes of "victimization" continue to be met with *Adivasi* assertions, including *Adivasi* social movements. Given the south Orissa *Adivasi* context, some key defining elements of a social movement might include (a) movement as indicative of a process of articulation of concerns/issues (e.g., *Adivasi* struggles around "own ways," land, water, and forest and cultural chauvanism/racism and discrimination); (b) movement as defined by the maturity and growing unity of an organized presence/vehicle for such articulations (e.g., emergence of a movement organization like the ADEA with an allegiance of over 21,000 people belonging to three *Adivasi* communities, each with several clans/sub-groupings) that engages a critical mass of people with a like-concern for core and evolving sets of "movement issues"; and (c) movement as organized action directed at oppositional (e.g., colonizing) social structural and institutional forces that "give cause" for such movements in the first place or movements as collective actors that might "buffer, accelerate, ameliorate, and challenge the shifting agendas of the state" (Ray & Katzenstein, 2005, p. 4).

Borrowing from Gramsci's use of the terms "subaltern" and "subaltern consciousness" (1971, p. 55, pp. 325-326) in relation to the peasantry, *Adivasi* movements can be defined as "subaltern movements," while keeping in mind Guha's (1982, pp. 5-8) observation that there are diversities and the ambiguities inherent in the concept when applied to the Indian context where the term subaltern signifies tribal (*Adivasis*), low caste agricultural laborers, sharecroppers, smallholder peasants, artisans, shepherds, and migrant landless labor working in plantations and mines. The term is also not just a substitute for peasantry or laboring poor/common people—it alludes to a recognition of the dialectical relationships of superordination and subordination that define social relations in hierarchical social formations (Ludden, 2005, p. 215). These aspects of the subaltern studies perspective are "productive" (in the Foucauldian sense of theorizing) in relation to the onto-epistemmic positioning of this research on *Adivasi* movements, learning, and agency in contemporary India.

SUBALTERN SOCIAL MOVEMENT LEARNING: *ADIVASI* ASSERTIONS AND THE DE/COLONIZATION OF SPACE

Adivasi Issues and the Purpose of the ADEA Movement: Our Ways, Land, Forests, and Unity

Typically, we (the research team) would meet with people from a particular village or the ADEA regional representatives of participating villages in the early morning from two to four hours per session, depending on the course of these conversations. Such gatherings usually took place in the village square (on the mandap or raised platform built for such occasions) and the purpose of each meeting was to discuss problematic issues (especially in relation to land and forests) for *Adivasis* and their implications for defining the purposes of the ADEA movement in the region. In addition to explicit comments spontaneously shared over the course of these conversations about the role of learning in the movement process, the research team also took note of how such movement learning was occurring at these very gatherings to discuss movement concerns. More often than not, all residents of a village (children, women, and men) would gather for these discussions, with the elders and leaders/ADEA representatives (women and men) seated on the mandap while the others lined the periphery of the *mandap*. After general introductions and greetings (sometimes expressed in "songs" of solidarity) and a brief explanation for the gathering, the discussion would commence. On one such occasion, a Kondh *Adivasi* man stood up and began the proceedings as follows:

> My name is ---- and my father's name is ----. My village is ----. I have ---- children and am 48 years old [some girls and boys/youth in the crowd giggle, perhaps implying that he could be older than he claimed!]. I am now a carpenter by trade and have studied till class 7. As a representative of the people in the ADEA, I am here to share our positions on what is ailing our communities and what the ADEA is doing about these issues. I recognize that this is a privilege and a responsibility for me to be able to share our common position as a peoples on these matters.
>
> We are the *mulo nivasi* (root people) and the people who dominated us, as history has taught us, came here 5000 years ago. They faught with our ancestors with their superior weapons and war tactics and defeated our peoples. They divided us into many divisions and sub-divisions and created *bhed-bhav* (or differences), took away our land and forests and created livelihood pressures so that we, the *Adivasis*, would continue to fight each other for survival.
>
> The *sarkar* (government) is doing a great injustice (*anyayo durniti*) and is involved in corrupt practices . . . With regard to land, they have given over 90% of the land to upper classes and castes (*goshtis*) and we, the 80% who are

> poor have just 5% of the cultivable land to meet our purposes. And the way they have framed laws around land-holding and distribution, we the poor are being squashed and stampeded into each other's space and are getting suffocated (*dalachatta hoi santholito ho chonti*). This creation of inequality (*taro tomyo*) is so widespread and so true—we see it in our lives and this is the root of all problems and we hold the government responsible for this . . ..
>
> Life in the town is not created for our type of life. The people of *shahar* (city) will never think about us. They would rather enjoy life from the benefits that come from the forest and mountains, like water and forest products. They tell us they want to modernize, make machines and industries for themselves. To do this, they are doing forceable encroachment of our land—they are all over our hills and stones. They are coming quietly to our forests and hills and in secrecy they are making plans to dig them up and destroy them (mining). Not only this, they are diverting our water to the towns (dams) for their use. They are making dams and water reservoirs, where our villages are to be submerged and we have to leave the place, leave the land and become landless and homeless. We have become silent spectators (*niravre dekhuchu*) to a repeated snatching away of our resources.
>
> Whenever we have tried to assert our land rights, we have been warned by the upper castes, their politician friends and the wealthy and have faced innumerable threats and retaliations. The *ucho-barga* (dominant castes and classes) will work to divide and have us fight each other till we are reduced to dust (*talitalanth*).

This lengthy description around land alienation and divide and rule tactics instigated by a collusion of state, caste, and class (outsiders and "moderns") interests is a thematic that runs across most discussions pertaining to hardship and problems being faced by *Adivasis* in the ADEA region. Pursuant to this exposition, another ADEA representative points to key purposes and functions for the ADEA, including an educative responsibility.

> *Ekta Abhijan* (ADEA) stands on a root called unity (*ekta*) and the promotion of unity will always be the primary requirement—a unity of minds, hearts and feeling of togetherness. The artificially created sense of difference, divisions and *jati-goshti* (caste-class feelings) need to be destroyed. Our *dhwoja* (flag) is unity (*ekta*) and we have to fly it high (*oraiba*). The flag that ADEA flies is of the people who have lost their land and their forests and who are losing their very roots.
>
> As an activist of the ADEA, I know that we are working to build a healthy youth society (*sustha yuva samaj*). We must continue to debate and create awareness on land and forest issues—it is a political awareness, an adult education about society (*samajik shiksha*)—a different kind of schooling perhaps?
>
> We have a hope in our movement (ADEA). We need to take strong action so that *shahari* (city) people and outside exploiters will not capture our land, forests, hills and water. ADEA will work to ensure that they have no clue as to

> how to continue this process of control. When the time is right, we will need to tie our knot (*samoyo thao thao ganthi bandhiba darkar*). The people will be activated by the ADEA so that the dominant groups can not continue to shock us. We need to face the Oriya caste who look down on us as neech (beneath them) as one. It is a significant development to think that poor people who were just lying low for years are actively tightening their belts (*onta bhirunchanti*) and in our region, this has already happened and will continue to happen.

When discussing the question of forests on another occasion, a Kondh *Adivasi* man had this to say:

> People come from nearby towns and stay in our forests over night. They cut our *pia sal* (costly timber for furniture) and take them away. The government and the companies come and take away truckloads of bamboo. The forests which our ancestors nurtured (*banchaye chanti*) is getting destroyed by these *bahari ko lok* (outsiders). When these things happen, the forest guards give them protection and when we have needs, they ask us if we have paid our royalty or have you paid your taxes on the tamarind trees—we are taxed for each of these trees. When they take truckloads of sal timbers, bamboos and the paper mills exploit this place for their business – how can they say the *Adivasis* are destroying the forests when they are the ones doing this? When the *Adivasi* depends on the forest for their life, the *vyavasahi* (business people) and the government are destroying them for their own profit (*labho*).

An old Domb man adds (with apparent sarcasm), "We measured a hand length but we always walked a foot length (try to make do with less)—but even my ancestors would not be able to explain why they insist on the reverse (always try for more)." On the same occasion (village D) a Kondh woman leader had this to say about forests and forest-related hardships in the area:

> The *sarkar* (government) and their workers think that we *Adivasis* do not know anything and we are good for nothing, that we are weak and powerless and will not question them if they treat us unjustly. That is why they think that they do not need to ask us anything before going ahead. That's why they think they can put their pressure and power on us (*shakti a bong prayogo karanti*). To the government, we are of no significance (*sarkar amar prathi heyogyano karuchi*). They are selling our forests, they are selling our water and they are selling our land and may be they will sell us also … .
>
> The Forest Department comes and asks us to create a Forest Protection Committee (*jungle surakshya manch*). Protection from whom should I ask? They are the ones that lie and take bribes from outsiders who destroy the forest, people from the cities who come and destroy our timbers, cut them and take them away while they protect them and these activities! They could have enforced the law that they talk to us about all the time? But if we cut a small piece of wood here and there to make a cot/bed, chair or door panel, these people come in to our houses as if we have decimated the forests! They are

> not serving the public as public servants but rather, they are serving themselves (*shae mane chakiriya hisab re amo paey sbha koru na hanthi*)—so we do not cooperate because they really do not care about the forest! We need to protect the forest from them!

A man from the gathering interjects, shouting in apparent anger, "When we clear up wasted forest land to do cultivation, these officers trouble us and they are the same people who are quietly taking away bamboo and timber in truckloads. The government and the companies do this (*sarkar o company bhethore achanti*). And when we get a small piece of wood for repairing our house, they put their seal on it and file a case against us for illegal felling."

The Kondh woman continues by referring to the significance of forests to the *Adivasi* and the implications of this and "outsider destruction" for the ADEA:

> We are the real protectors of the forest (*ame jangalo surokhya kariba lokho*) because we are the ones that have always depended on the forests for our well being. For us all plants and animals are equally valuable whether it is *pia sal, kalami* and *mahul*. Our forests are our history and our culture (*amor jangalo, amaro itihas ote avom a thi amoro sanskriti*) … .
>
> The Gods have given us all this wealth and surrounding. But the government says the land on which you have *patta* (title) is yours and the rest is the governments! This is not our way and the government does not understand. The water for instance, does not belong to anyone like the government thinks—it is given by God for the forests, the animals and humans alike. But the government would not understand this. This soil does not belong to the government or the government's parents (*sarkar kimba aur tanko bapar ko mati nahi tho*). They have been given to us by the Gods through the ages. Who is this government (*e sarkar kee?*) that lets the paper mills take the longest bamboo and best wood and then asks us for royalty and taxes for small cuts for poles?…
>
> The ADEA is there to fight collectively (*sangram*) to save (*raksha*) the forests and to protect our way of life. The ADEA is a means of collective struggle for the forest (*ame samastha mishi sangram o kariba*). We are all members of the ADEA and our struggle is around *khadyo, jamin, jalo, jangalo o ektha* (food, land, water, forest and unity).

The same session concluded with a Kui (Kondh language) song on the sacredness of the forests and the forest as the domain of Gods and ancestors (*purba purusha*) through many generations (*pithro-pithro purusha*). Any collective analysis/discussion around land and forest was always (across villages and gatherings engaged in the research) permeated with an over-riding pervasive significance and connection to the metaphysical realm of Gods and Goddesses and ancestors and spirits—all in conjunc-

tion with a pragmatic appreciation for land, forests, and water.

This forest, this mountain and this land is ours

Given by our Gods to our ancestors

But people are destroying the forests, they are cutting the trees, they are plucking leaves and making them barren

Is this now left as ours for name sake? How can we depend on it if everything is gone?

Oh God of sun (surjo devta), oh moon God (Chandra devta), why are you giving us sorrows?... [and they call for the Gods to help them in their struggle, including Gungi (forest goddess), Pahar devta (mountain god), ghaso devta (God of green grass), Dhuli devta (God of dust), Durga pena (rain god) etc.]

Movement Learning and Purpose: Lamentations, Elder Discourses and Collective Action

Our souls weep (atma kanduchi): Adivasi lamentations and learning through problematization and historicization of land and forest dispossession. After exchanging greetings, one of the team members went from hut to hut to invite people for the discussion/meeting. By 7:00 p.m. some 60 people (men, women, and children of all ages) had gathered in the village square and an electric bulb was arranged for the event (this, we were told by a young man, amounts to what the government calls an "electrified village"). After a formal introduction by the village leader and a repeat explanation for our visit, an elderly lady asked those assembled if she could begin proceedings with a song accompanied by a *sarangi* or a stringed instrument. There was a general buzz of approval as two young boys ran to get the instrument. Accompanied by three other women (younger ladies), the elderly lady sang while playing the *sarangi*:

In olden times oh brothers and oh sisters

In the time of the British rule, the Britishers used our grandparents like servants and beat them severely to make them work

During that period oh brothers and sisters, the revenue collectors came and took the measurement of our lands and paddy fields

They said, "you will be given land, paddy fields and dry land"

We went to work even when we did not have anything to eat

But when the work was done

Our land, our paddy fields and dry land were transferred to the rich people and the big people, the outsiders

From then we lost our way, from then we are hopeless

Woman singer: Through this song we remember our past, how, from the time of the Britishers till today, we have been exploited by the outsiders and the rich. How in hunger and in sickness we have not stopped working. Even when we have been wounded we have not stopped working. Our bad days continue till today. We remember this through this song and our souls weep (*atma kanduchi*). We weep together, young and old as you can see (pointing to the gathering).

That is why we cleared up the mountains where the monkeys lived and we started working there

We cleared up the mountain where the tiger lived and worked there

We became one with the bush and shrubs, we became one with the forest

Time came for tilling the hilly land (bagara), time came for the days of work

We struggled under the sun and we rotted in the scorching heat and we laboured

We ate porridge made of mango kernels (tanku), we ate porridge from the kernel of the Salab tree (type of palm)

We drank sour porridge and laboured on

We became one with the rock, we became one with the tree stump (khunta) and we became one with the soil

Our rotting in the scorching sun was in vain as we did not get enough crops from the bagara (land) on the hills

From then we ate fruits that monkeys ate and we ate roots and tubers that were bitter (pitta).

Elder man: The plain land has been taken away (fertile valley bottoms) and whatever is left has been marked by the *sarkar* (government) as grazing land or military land. The *sarkar* has hundreds of ways to reserve land for itself and keep people away. The flat land is no longer accessible to us. We, the *Adivasis*, have access to only hilly land for cultivation to sustain us (stony land, sloping, and often degraded/waste land). The British prospered on our backs as their cultivators and today they still exploit us like the British did by taking away our land. We are people of land and forest and without them, there is nothing. We sing this song because this is an expression of our *sangharsh* (struggle).

Such "laments" and collective post-mortem/analysis are common at most gatherings (political and social) and suggests *Adivasi* movement learning around land and forest issues through problematization of a historic process of dispossession from British colonial times to today's internal colonialism exercised by the state and rich "outsiders" (usually referring to Oriya/Hindu caste groups from the urban centers or urban peripher-

ies). The gradual marginalization of the *Adivasi* into the remote hilly areas is also a recurrent theme in such lamentations and is linked to material processes of alienation (e.g., state land classification schemes) and social groups (outsiders/Oriyas and state institutions like the Revenue and Forest departments). Some *Adivasi* leaders and elders are very aware of the contemporary methods of dispossession by state-corporate/private interests and the ethnic and caste biases of the state in relation to land control and use patterns. Such revelations and historico-political learning around *Adivasi* marginalization have been shared in the first edition of Arkatha, the people's research sharing journal being supported through this research. Such forms of learning are instrumental in helping to establish ADEA movement purposes around *Adivasi* land and forest action.

"Living solidly like gold": Lamentations and conflict, peace, reconciliation and unity. A Kondh *Adivasi* adult male elder picked up his dheka (stringed instrument made from bamboo and gourd) and sang the following lamentation, after a desperate plea for unity among subalterns and specifically, the Dombs, the Kondhs and the Saoras (the lament implores the Dombs referred to as people of the Dasmandigas to come to the aid of the Kondhs who have been invaded by the Saoras and to seek reconciliation and brotherhood):

Mother oh mother, oh father, oh brother, you are so sad

So much pain and trouble and so many things to think about

Do you see our sorrows oh Sun god, oh God of the Daylight . . .

Oh father, oh mother we have become hopeless like a widow

The aggressors became tigers, bears and Gods and ate us . . .

Oh brothers of Dasmandiga (a cluster of 10 Domb villages) don't you see this?

(because they/Dombs are not coming to help them/the Kondhs)

Even the stars in the sky can see this and the moon is witness too . . .

Oh my younger brother (appeal to aggressors/Saoras) understand

You have become wild like snakes and frogs . . .

Oh friends let us go to the aggressors and bow our heads before them and also tell them that we too can become wild like oxen

We can multiply like the fruits of the fig tree

But still, let us make peace with them and live in peace

Even if it means we have to bow down before them and touch their feet . . .

So many have died and so many destroyed—our forest is weeping and our land is weeping for us . . . the Gods have made them like hailstorms and like thunder and

> *lightening—our village is in ruins . . .*
>
> *Oh brothers, come to this paddy field and let us sit together with our aggressors and seek forgiveness from each other*
>
> *From today we make our hearts one—whoever amongst us has committed offences, whoever has been given punishment*
>
> *Let us forget all that and live in peace and live solidly like gold . . .*
>
> (The singer and the gathered *Adivasi* villagers, over one hundred people, are in tears and wail in unison at different points in the rendition).

Such lamentations contribute to the process of realizing ADEA movement purposes around the need for unity among subalterns and makes people more aware of the politics of divide and rule and who ultimately has the most to lose from such conflict.

This is not our way: Learning through elder discourses. An *Adivasi* elder addresses the intrusions of modern/outside concepts of ownership and land as follows:

> Earlier all these forests and the land area belonged to all the people who lived in the area. In the past, in the time of our grandparents, we (these two villages) had one common graveyard, we had a common system of sharing (or *bheda* in the Saora language, in relation to sharing of fruits, benefits, forest products, meat and land/forest usage) and we had a collective contribution system to support each other. Land was not assigned to any particular person or family—it was a common claim that goes back to our ancestors. We were together in joys and sorrows.
>
> But since the government's revenue demarcation of land and forests, what belonged to all of us suddenly got divided in to two *moujas*/areas of claim and people have started saying,"this is mine and this is mine". They (the *Adivasis* of the neighboring village) are now not allowing us to even set foot in their mouja and they are saying that you should not cut our trees or bamboo for your use. And we are doing the same. This is not our way.

He continues to expose the divide and rule tactics of the state, upper caste groups, and commercial interests (moderns), imploring the "young ones" to listen carefully for this is about us.

> There is communal conflict around land and forests because the political powers, in order to keep their control and access to these vital resources, are promoting division and hatred among the communities (Domb, Kondh and Saora). Our communities once had equal access to land and forests, which today has been controlled using outside methods of the *sarkar* (government) and the *vyaparis* (business classes) and upper castes (Brahmins). They want to perpetuate their ways and ideas among us and always keep us divided. We are all *garib sreni* (poor class) and land and forest are vital for our survival. And if they succeed in controlling them, they also end up controlling our lives. As has

> been the case over the ages, they want us to live in disharmony and difference so that they can be the *shashaks* (rulers) all the time. So they have done this.

A village elder from another village sheds additional light on the matter of *Adivasi* ways in relation to the significance of a forest-based existence:

> Who wants to go to the city to join the Oriyas and do business and open shops and be *shahari* (city/modern) if they give you a chance or to do labour like donkeys to get one meal? Even if they teach us, we do not want to go to the cities—these are not the ways of the *Adivasi*. We can not leave our forests (*ame jangale chari paribo nahi*). The forest is our second home (after the huts). We have a deep relationship with our forests (*jangale sahitho gobhiro sampark*). There is no distance between our homes and the forest. You just come out and you have everything you would need. You have stream water. You have *jhuna* (type of insense). If you want to hunt for deer, wild goats and boars, you need not run any where. You will get them easily. In our forests, tell me what you can not find? We have roots and tubers which we can eat. We have herbs to treat our sickness. We have tamarind and for our clothes we grow cotton. We grow millet and we have ropes, thatch and bamboo for making our homes. It is difficult even to leave our own forest and go to another to live because in our forest we know what is where. My friends and brothers, we are from the forest. That is why we use the small sticks of the *karanja* tree to brush our teeth—not tooth brushes. Our relationship with the forest is like a finger nail is to flesh (*nakho koo mangsho*)—we can not be separated. The past is the present and the present is the past and they are the future, past and present. We are as we are, we are as we have been and we will be as we are and have been. That is why we are *Adivasi*.

Learning through collective action. During the last ten years *Adivasis* and the ADEA have taken several steps to work on land, forest, and water issues as indicated by several research participants and organizational records. For example, one participant states, "we are 'encroaching' on and taking control over (*akthiar*) anawadi land (unclaimed and unused state land) and have worked to bring fallow land in to use." ADEA land records indicate that some 6000 plus acres of land are currently in dispute and are being reclaimed as per the Directives of State Policy and 5th Schedule rights (the Constitution of India) which make it possible for *Adivasis* and people living below the poverty line to use unclaimed and unused state land for the purposes of subsistence. ADEA villages have moved en masse to begin such land takeovers and plantation (fruit orchards in the forested areas) and agricultural (growing millet, lentils and grains) activities on land being "re-possessed" with an eye on land that gives them such legal and constitutional grounds for takeover (as opposed to previous occupations that placed them on more vulnerable terms with the state). As one research participant states:

> We have done micro planning at the village level and together, have prepared village maps. We developed land formulas for ourselves—we have seen what we can accomplish together. Water sources that were once defunct have now come alive, just like we have. Through the ADEA and collective pressure we have secured house *pattas* (titles) for 72 families in our village alone (according to ADEA records, over 60% of the families in the movement area now have title over their hutment land and are now not susceptible to summary evictions as encroachers) and we are pressuring the state for land distribution and reclassification in our favor. We are giving importance to land occupation (*padar bari akthiar*) and land use (*chatriya chatri*). We are now beginning to see the fruits of occupations. Before the government uses *anawadi* land to plant cashew, eucalyptus or virtually gives the land to bauxite mining companies, we must "encroach and occupy" and put the land to use through our plantation activities and agricultural use. This has become our knowledge through joint land action. This knowledge is not only with me now but with all our people—what are the ways open to us—this is like the opening of knowledge that was hidden to us for ages.

A Kondh man from another village sheds additional light on the importance and effectiveness of collective action and what they have learnt when he says,

> I have learnt that if I am alone I can not take on the government because I am not powerful by myself. But when we sit together, discuss and find out proper ways together, much more is accomplished. When we go as a village to government departments or officers, they don't care but when 20 villages go in the name of the ADEA, they are compelled to listen. Through collective pressure – and we have to go at them like water on stone-- the BDO (Block Development Officer), the doctor or *tehsildar*, the revenue inspector and police now listen and we are more successful at land reclassification, securing hutment land *pattas*, getting tube wells and wells dug, ponds dug and making sure that they know that we know what they are supposed to be doing as public servants of the people. We have big issues and that is why we will always need bigger unity (*bara ekta*) and a bigger federation (*sangha badha*). We have learnt that collective action gets results and even the government gets afraid (*sarkar bhaiyo koruchi*) and work is done immediately (*sighro kajo kari hoichi*).

A Saora leader of the ADEA points out the role of the ADEA in promoting unity (*ekta*) and the significance of this effort:

> ADEA has taken up the need for unity between us. We have seen that if we have unity, nobody can take away anything from us be it our trees and leaves, our land and bagara areas (shifting cultivation areas). If we have unity, never mind the outsiders, even the government will not be able to take away the land. They will have to settle it in our name. ADEA has been actively spreading the message that we must have peace and communal harmony (*samprodahiko srunkhala*).

A Kondh male member with a strong sense of commitment to the ADEA as a collective force for education and awareness raising suggests that the ADEA has moved to create a forum for political learning and change:

> There have been many changes. One of them is the level of awareness in us about oppression and the vital need for changes—an awareness that not only changes the person but the community perspective as well and in our thinking and response to the situations around us. Acting together has given us a different direction/vision (*bhinna-diga*). The ADEA has become a platform for us because we have made it so. Even though some people still say that this is our destiny (*bhagya*), most people today because of ADEA action would challenge this idea of destiny (*bhagya*) … . We have to teach each other (*bujha-sujha*), explain to each other and that is how education has happened and made things possible for us. … We organize workshops and gatherings and have created a learning environment for all our people—I feel so happy and satisfied, I can not tell you—we have been creating a political education around land, forest and water issues and debating courses of action. We are expanding in terms of participation and we need to keep generating more awareness on more issues that affect us.

Lastly, in relation to the purposes of the ADEA movement pertaining to unity, land, and forests and *Adivasi* ways, what are leaders of the movement saying to the state/outsiders? According to a Kondh leader,

> …we are laying a claim on the government who is supposed to serve all the people in this land. We are demanding a place for ourselves —we are questioning the government and asking them to help us develop our land using our ways. ADEA's idea is that our livelihood should be protected and our traditional occupations and relationship to the land and forest be protected in the form of community control over land and forests in our areas and this is our understanding of our constitutional rights too. There is no contradiction. Once this is understood, we can cooperate and when necessary, work with the government to take care of the land and forests. If they can help the *shaharis* (moderns/urban peoples) destroy the forests, then they can and should help us to protect it and listen to our story too.

A Domb woman leader had this to say to the government:

> In relation to land, forest and water, we in ADEA want that the government must not have control or rights over our natural resources (*ame chaho je sarkar amo prakrutic sampader opera adhikar kimba niyantrano no kori*). For example, village organization has the right to manage forests. The land that people have occupied and need, the government should not put pressure for eviction. People have right to cultivable land which they have been using in accordance with their knowledge and traditions. The government should rather help us to develop our agriculture by finding ways to support us. And instead of big dams, it should erect check dams (small scale irrigation) to help us in our cultivable land for irrigation.

And according to a Saora leader of the ADEA,

> … if the government continues to control land, forests and water that we have depended on since our ancestors came, then through the ADEA we will be compelled to engage in a collective struggle (*ame samohiko bhabe, sangram kariba pahi badhyo hebu*). ADEA is building a movement among us from village to panchayat to federation levels. I think this movement (*andolan*) should spread to the district and become a district level struggle. The organization is always giving us new ideas (*nothon chinta*), new education (nothon shikhya), awareness (*chetna*) and *jojona* (plans). We believe this will continue (*ao yu eha kari chalibo amaro viswas*).

When asked about their assessment of the following statement by the International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty, a coalition of over 500 rural organizations (including the influential Via Campesina, one of the largest peasant, indigenous, and landless people's groups), the leadership of the ADEA unanimously endorsed the declaration and expressed their solidarity with the coalition:

> No agrarian reform is acceptable that is based only on land redistribution. We believe that the new agrarian reform must include a cosmic vision of the territories of communities of peasants, the landless, indigenous peoples, rural workers, fisherfolk, nomadic pastoralists, tribal, afro-descendents, ethnic minorities, and displaced peoples, who base their work on the production of food and who maintain a relationship of respect and harmony with Mother Earth and the oceans (Via Campesina, 2006).

SOCIAL MOVEMENT LEARNING, ADIVASI ASSERTIONS, AND THE DECOLONIZATION OF SPACE

Phase one of this research into learning in *Adivasi* social movements seeks to understand *Adivasi* issues and related ADEA movement purposes and movement learning contributions towards the definition of these purposes and related achievements. It is increasingly evident from the preceding exposition of emergent themes that this movement seeks to affirm *Adivasi* ways and secure *Adivasi* land and forest spaces through a concerted attempt to build unity and collective action, given the increasing incursions (e.g., divide and scatter/isolate tactics) by state-capitalist and caste/outsider political-economic interests. Relatedly, forms of movement learning that help to build the collective appreciation for these movement purposes (and prompt the necessary motivation for engaging in organized activism) include learning from lamentations, which problematize and historicize land and forest dispossession; learning from elder discourses on *Adivasi* ways and contradictions with modern (*shahari*) lives; and learn-

ing from engaging in movement-inspired collective action to reclaim the land and the forests against tremendous odds (a decolonization of *Adivasi* space that has already placed 6000 plus acres of land and forest in dispute, as people go ahead and cultivate grains, fruits, and vegetables, while increasing numbers of families continue to secure titles to hutment area land, sealing themselves off from random eviction as "illegal squatters"). These are but a few illustrative examples and initial glimpses of learning in *Adivasi* movements, as the research continues to reveal the numerous contributions of learning in social movements.

Movement learning is clearly linked to the achievement of movement purposes around land and forest as collective action has taught people how to "reclaim" land and forests and assert legal and political rights and Constitutional guarantees that are of "selective utility" in realizing *Adivasi* conceptions of sovereignty[4], while playing a significant part in cultivating a growing sense of the importance of subaltern unity in collective action. Appeals to past struggles, lamentations, calls for unity through song, elder parables and collective dissections of the same, continue to massage a maturing sense of the significance of the movement and help to build on community understandings of the stated and evolving ADEA movement purposes. Such cultural mediums scaffold the collectivity and provide the necessary glue for joint action to address the decolonization of land and forest spaces that are so vital to forest-based cultures.

The catalytic validity of this research is confirmed through research as collective movement reflection (which is simultaneously interpreted as a systematic approach to the gathering of data pertaining to guiding questions) on several occasions; the sharing of research-driven perspectives through the first issue of the people's research sharing journal, *Arkatha,* addressing "*Adivasi history, culture and politics*" and its subsequent impact in fostering deliberations during local panchayat elections that witnessed the unprecedented election of a record number of *Adivasi* leaders into local government (much to the "violent consternation" of the local nexus of traditional power holders); the development of participatory indigenous research understanding for a team of six *Adivasi* researchers; the establishment of the people's Center for Research and Development Solidarity (CRDS), which has already germinated as a voice for indigenous research and knowledge construction; support for community grain banks in the ADEA region; and the initiation of an enhanced appreciation for ADEA movement purposes, analysis, and

[4]See Barker (2005) for a useful and extended discussion on indigenous conceptions of sovereignty and self-determination. Alfred's chapter on "sovereignty" (pp. 33-50) is arguably, particularly revealing when it comes to understanding Adivasi conceptions of the same.

objectives through research-encouraged collective reflection. In the final analysis, people's growing desire to participate in this research process is itself a significant testimony to the catalytic validity of the research.

THEORETICAL ENGAGEMENTS: RADICAL ADULT EDUCATION/LEARNING AND SUBALTERN PERSPECTIVES

The catalytic validity of this research, while addressing grounded participant considerations, is also informed by and subsequently contributes towards theoretical reflection. Theoretical constellations pertinent to this research into learning in *Adivasi* social movements include (a) Euro-American discussions on radical adult education and learning in struggle and (b) subaltern perspectives on movements/struggle in the Indian context. In this final and closing segment, selective engagements with these theoretical constructions are briefly entertained in the interests of continued theoretical reflection stimulated by this research.

Adivasi Social Movements and Radical Adult Education and Learning

Research preoccupations around learning in "radical" social movements/struggles in Euro-American post/industrial contexts tend to congeal around civil societarian (Habermasian applications or "Marxist-neoliberalism," see Holst, 2007) and socialist perspectives (Marxism) on radical adult education and social movements (Holst, 2002) and related feminist articulations (Miles, 1996). Some adherents[5] are in danger of appropriating peasant, indigenous, and/or rural movements and struggles in the recently independent countries and regions of Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa "into" peasant/industrial Marxist political-conceptual trajectories on the one hand or "into" a civil society concept and middle class urban consumerist politics, preoccupied with questions of identity, individual rights, environment, and gender which, in turn, are exclusively embedded in enlightenment onto-epistemmic and axiological origins.

The "portability" of these Eurocentric-theoretical projects that have emerged in industrial contexts is questionable, both in terms of possible epistemic colonizations (a tendency to speak for all spaces, peoples/cultures, and times) or in terms of an insensitivity to the contextual embeddedness of theorizing when applied to rural and peripheral movements in recently independent nations and regions. Radical adult education schol-

[5]See Holst's (2007, p. 8) proposition regarding socialist big utopias, objective communist movements and the mundane day-to-day needs of populations on the margins of capital or see Hall's (2000) conception of an all encompassing "global civil society" as the dominant protagonists of social change.

arship is largely oblivious to the coloniality of these contexts[6] and their distinct internal/culturally specific onto-political orientations (Kapoor, 2003a, 2003b) that continue to shape these movements/learning and their material and ideological prospects. Unsurprisingly, *Adivasi* movements often appropriate the human rights or civil societarian discourse (e.g., around notions of people's participation or individual rights) or Marxist conceptions (e.g., revolutionary left-party sloganeering), digesting them within localized frames of reference or instrumentalizing them in the interests of *Adivasi* prospects and existence rationalities (Kapoor, in press). Such strategic utilizations need to be recognized as such and understood within the various contexts of the historic struggles of the *Adivasis*.

In terms of the teleology of *Adivasi* movements, for instance, subaltern studies pick up on the foregrounding of the mythico-religious basis of subaltern movements, as David Hardiman speaks to the relative autonomy of tribal movements in India where "divine commands were a powerful program for *Adivasi* assertion" or what he calls "…this fundamentally religious ideology of peasant action" (Ludden, 2005, p. 113). Similarly, Partha Chatterjee (Ludden, 2005, p. 229) observed that "Religion provides an ontology, an epistemology, as well as a practical code of ethics, including political ethics" and that when "subalterns act politically, the symbolic meaning of particular acts—their signification—must be found in religious terms." Such movement interpretations and their implications for shaping movement learning/purpose, elude Euro-American Marxist and civil societarian radical educators with an interest in "explaining and claiming" movements/learning on the margins of capital. Furthermore, dominant Euro-American conceptions of movements and associated or partially derived discourses in Indian social movement scholarship (Shah, 2004), foreground and configure an "anti" orientation that does not necessarily characterize an overriding movement dimension of *Adivasi* movements with dominant concerns around ensuring "continuities" (resilience) in the face of "calamities" (with implications for preserving *Adivasi* ways), cosmic notions of stewardship and pluralistic coexistences which extend beyond human relations to include relations with nature, ancestors, Gods, and spirit worlds in conjunction with a pragmatic eye towards meeting the daily necessities of any human community.

The "coloniality of power" (Mignolo, 2000) also alludes to the centripetal role of a "racial psycho-emotional" colonial attack (with obvious material implications) as *Adivasis* speak to a politics of denigration (e.g., pejorative references to *Adivasi*'s as "monkeys," as "pest infestations," and as "dirty/

[6]For example, Freire's anti-colonial roots are often submerged in these "Northern theoretical projects" of "radical adult education" with few exceptions (Mayo, 2004).

stained") and relegation to "insignificance" (see Kondh woman leader's reference to *Adivasis* as being seen as insignificant and therefore of no consequence to the state when "development plans" simply go ahead as if "they are not there"—similar notions of cultural superiority/inferiority and backward/forward that have "justified" such treatment typify colonial encounters). Casteism (reference to outside Oriya and Brahmin interests) is also implicated in caste-race discrimination and victimization, often expressed in terms of continued colonization of *Adivasi* land and forest space with impunity, as *Adivasi*'s experience caste-dismissal as "*ananta paapi*" (eternal sinners) and "*colonkitha*" (stained/polluted) peoples. The assertion of "*Adivasi* ways" in the face of such colonial denigrations provides *Adivasi* movements and the learning dimensions of these movements with a critical-colonial address that escapes radical adult education scholarship/theorizing on movement learning. The racialized-casteist colonial vector in a subaltern politics of domination and resistance has characterized, both, British and post-independence attempts at colonial subjugation of the *Adivasi*. Such movement-specificities are too significant to be overlooked in the quest for grand explanations and point out limits to politico-theoretical elasticity in relation to the kaliedoscope of political cultures.

Subaltern Studies and Adivasi Social Movements

Not without controversy and partially inspired by Gramscian-Marxism and more recently, postcolonial-culturalist preoccupations with representation, voice, agency and language, subaltern studies (Guha, 1982) has provided an initial and a selectively continuing impetus for this proposed research scrutinizing learning in *Adivasi* social movements. Subaltern studies recognizes that despite the formation of new social groups and institutions in rural and urban life under the aegis of British rule and post-independence modernization and development, subaltern collectivities (like the *Adivasis*) "have continued to exist vigorously and even develop new forms and content" (Ludden, 2005, p. 100). Subaltern studies have explored a wide range of issues that have been neglected in South Asia as forms of popular protest, including grain riots, small-scale peasant insurgencies, and struggles over forest rights and uprisings of hill and *Adivasi* peoples. "They have defined a subaltern consciousness separate from hegemonic cultural forms … realized in the practice of rural resistance" (Sivaramakrishnan, 2005, p. 217). Subaltern perspectives have helped to position this research, have aided the research process in the manner of providing possible probes/avenues for exploration and, in some cases, have helped to discern movement learning in this context,

while continually being subjected to interrogation by *Adivasi* constructions and localized praxis.

Subaltern studies emerged in 1982 as an alternative to elite historiography. In the *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* (1983), Ranajit Guha (the intellectual inspiration behind this project) depicted tribal revolts as completely separate (an autonomous domain of peasant or tribal politics) from nationalism and as a horizontally integrated resistance to elite domination across several subaltern groups, as opposed to vertical integration and incorporation into an elite politics. As asserted by Ranajit Guha, subaltern studies sought to explore the neglected realm of popular subaltern autonomy in action, consciousness, and culture as opposed to bourgeois-nationalist histories that explained the anti-colonial movements far too often in terms of leaders portrayed as idealistic or as charismatic nationalists. Similarly, subaltern studies took issue with conventional Marxist readings of modern Indian history, where peasant and labor movement studies concentrated more on economic conditions and the predominance of Left organizational and ideological lineages and affiliations. In Guha's terms, preceding forms of historiography have tended to exclude the rebel as the conscious subject of his own history, "incorporating him only as a contingent element in another history of the march of British imperium or Indian socialism" and nationalist idealism, i.e., a history that ignored the voice of "self-alienation of the rebel," all of which was "wasted on sterile discourse looking for a grand design" (Ludden, 2005, p. 219). The fundamental assumption and overarching theme in subaltern studies is that subalterns are subjects of history and the makers of their own destinies. Subaltern studies demonstrate "the extent to which peasant politics possessed autonomy within … encompassing structures of subordination" (Arnold, 1984, p. 169).

Specific critiques of subaltern studies have also proved useful in relation to theoretical insights with varied import for a study of learning in *Adivasi* social movements. First, the tendency to assume and take for granted the homogeneity/unity of political coalitions between and within subalterns rather than making this itself a subject of inquiry is problematic, i.e., a more careful account of subaltern initiative in the context of local power relations might dissipate the notion of subaltern unity, and points to possibilities in terms of, both, research and subaltern praxis. Or as Ortner (1995, p. 176) indicated, "…the lack of an adequate sense of prior and on-going politics among subalterns must inevitably contribute to an inadequate analysis of resistance itself." Otherwise history is simplified into unified subaltern groups lined up against monolithic elites or idyl-

lic past is counterpoised with turbulent present. Unity among subaltern groups (e.g., between *Adivasi* and other caste and peasant communities) is a central preoccupation and struggle within a struggle for the ADEA in south Orissa. While the observation that "subalterns are both dominated and dominating subjects" (Mallon, 1994, p. 1511) could well have eluded subaltern studies, Spivak's reminder is also instructive here, "…this privileging of marginal discourses and their autonomous construction is a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (cited in Loomba, 2005, p. 195).

Second, "resorting to anthropology and history from below can recover partial and hidden histories but it is not enough to juxtapose these fugitive accounts with master narratives and their exalted claims to total knowledge. The subaltern story may lose its punch if not situated in context" (Sivaramakrishnan, 2005, p. 216). By "context," Sivaramakrishnan and others (e.g., Arnold, 1984; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1992; Sarkar, 2005) are pointing out the need to examine and understand locally grounded perspectives and subaltern struggles in relation to social orders, institutions, and the history of material relations that mediate, shape, and/or influence the formation of subaltern/other subjects and their politics/learning. As a project that emerged in a left radical (hence the Gramscian-Marxist conceptual and analytical categories of subaltern studies) milieu of the 1960s and 70s and the growing disillusionment with organized left parties, received versions of Marxist ideology and the bureaucratic structures of actually existing socialisms, current critiques (see Sarkar, 2005) suggest a re-engagement with Gramscian-Marxism and the critiques of Marxism in the interests of a subaltern politics. Given the increasing engagement of *Adivasi*'s with state-corporate interests in relation to resource-exploitation in the forested interiors of Orissa, this critique of subaltern studies is particularly germane to understanding *Adivasi* political perspective and learning in social movements in today's neoliberal global/Indian economy, provided *Adivasi* interpretations and aspirations define these "left-encounters," i.e., subaltern studies have always emphasized the politics of the lower orders (subaltern groups) and their political consciousness and the central focus of this scholarship has been on these groups, their struggles and movements and activities, while dominant Euro-American traditions (from the left and the right) and Indian party politics shaped by the same, have either chosen to assimilate, ignore, or obscure the politics of the subaltern.

Third, and closely linked to the notion of re-engagements/resurrections of Gramscian-Marxist preoccupations, is the indictment of the culturalist

turn in certain versions of contemporary subaltern studies. Theoretical discussions at the interface of postcolonial analysis and subaltern studies/perspectives such as Dirlik's (1994, p. 356) contention that "Postcolonial critics have … rendered in to problems of subjectivity and epistemology concrete and material problems of the everyday world" or his reference to postcoloniality as "the condition of the intelligentsia of global capitalism" (p. 356) and similarly, Epko's (1995, p. 122) admonishment of the postcolonial intelligentsia and the penchant for cultural reductionism as the "hypocritical self-flattering cry of the children of hypercapitalism" and the "post-material disgust of the bored and the overfed" are relevant to understanding *Adivasi* movement purposes/struggles. As this research demonstrates, *Adivasis* are very much attuned to the pragmatics of material dispossession (of physical space), of political-economy and law, of hegemonic material impositions by state-corporate and caste interests and the necessity for decolonizing these material manifestations of colonial domination or in the words of one *Adivasi* research participant, "…our struggle is around *khadyo, jamin, jalo, jangalo o ektha* (food, land, water, forest and unity)."

Also in keeping with the culturalist turn and questions around "voice" and "inside-outside" relations in subaltern studies, Spivak's (1988) response to the challenge of rediscovering the authentic voice of the subaltern (the project of subaltern studies—illuminating the autonomous space of subaltern insurgency where the subaltern speak in full self-possession of his/her words) as ventriloquism or the notion that "counter-transference designates the possibility that the historian-analyst will tend to speak in the place of the analysand, pre-interpreting historical meaning from an always already occupied position of mastery" (Ludden, 2005, p. 238), raises critical questions about agency and the quest to study and/or amplify subaltern voices/politics by "outsiders." However, an exaggerated version of the "subaltern can not speak" mutes the very possibility of engaging subaltern groups at any level, suffocating participatory praxis and more importantly, patronizing subaltern relationship by elevating the impacts of colonial domination (Parry, 1987), whereby the "colonized subject is taken to have been literally constituted by colonialism alone" (Ludden, 2005, p. 408)—an assumption that is being rendered problematic by this research into *Adivasi* agency/movements. Spivak does concede (Loomba, 2005, p. 203), however, that precisely because the "subaltern cannot speak," it is the duty of "postcolonial" intellectuals to represent her/him and to make the importance of subalterns to history known.

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