CULTURAL SPACE AND ETHNIC IDENTITY IN INDIAN TRIBAL LITERATURE: A STUDY OF NARAYAN, MANE AND SHEKHAR

Thesis submitted to
the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the award of the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Submitted by
Seeja H

Under the supervision of

Dr. Arunlal K
Associate Professor
Department of English
Govt College, Mokeri

PG Department of English and Centre for Research
Govt. College, Mokeri, Kozhikode

UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
KERALA, INDIA

2025

Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **Cultural Space and Ethnic Identity in Indian Tribal Literature: A Study of Narayan, Mane and Shekhar** submitted to the University of Calicut for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Language and Literature is an original bona fide work of research carried out by **Seeja H**. under my supervision and that it has not been previously submitted for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles.

Place: Govt. College, Mokeri
Date: 12-03-2026

Dr. Arunlal K
Research Supervisor &
Associate Professor of English
PG Department of English and
Centre for Research,
Govt. College, Mokeri, Kozhikode

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I also certify that the corrections/suggestions from adjudicators have been incorporated in the revised thesis.

Place: Govt. College, Mokeri
Date: 12-03-2026

GOVERNMENT COLLEGE, MOKERI
P.O. MOKERI - 673 507

Dr. Arunlal K
Research Supervisor &
Associate Professor of English
PG Department of English and
Centre for Research,
Govt. College, Mokeri, Kozhikode

Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in the thesis entitled **Cultural Space and Ethnic Identity In Indian Tribal Literature: A Study of Narayan, Mane and Shekhar** is based on the original work done by me under the guidance of Dr. Arunlal K Associate Professor, Department of English Govt College, Mokeri and has not been included in any other thesis submitted previously for the award of any degree. The contents of the thesis are undergone plagiarism check using *iThenticate* software at C.H.M.K. Library, University of Calicut, and the similarity index found within the permissible limit. I also declare that the thesis is free from AI generated contents.

Seeja H

Dr. Arunlal K
Associate Professor
Department of English
Govt College, Mokeri

Place: Govt. College, Mokeri.
Date:

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CERTIFICATE ON PLAGIARISM CHECK

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**In case of languages like Malayalam, Tamil etc..on which no software is available for plagiarism check, a manual check shall be made by the Doctoral Committee, for which an additional certificate has to be attached.*

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Seeja H

CULTURAL SPACE AND ETHNIC IDENTITY IN INDIAN TRIBAL LITERATURE: A STUDY OF NARAYAN, MANE AND SHEKHAR.

Abstract

The thesis *Cultural Space and Ethnic Identity in Indian Tribal Literature: A Study of Narayan, Mane, and Shekhar* shall explore the complex interplay of cultural space and ethnic identity through adopting an interdisciplinary approach to the academic study of the most important writings by tribal authors in India. Tribal literature is a relatively new literary field, with its most significant writings emerging only quite recently as a result of the interaction of complex factors, such as the diverse geographical terrain of India, the tribal authors' attainment of sufficient formal education to provide literary expression of their experiences of marginalization, and the rise of new social movements meant to preserve tribal identity and culture against the encroachment of industrial forces from outside their native lands.

The thesis itself is divided into seven chapters, with the introductory chapter addressing the background information necessary to conduct the study, as well as its objectives, research questions, methodology, and significance. In addition, this section contains a summary of the primary texts to be analysed.

The second chapter ''Contextualising Tribal Literature" provides a brief introduction to the genre of tribal literature through calling attention to its present social context and ideologies in order to discuss the fundamental concepts of Cultural Studies and ethnic identity through the lens of the most relevant concepts drawn from the fields of Subaltern Studies, Spatial Studies, and Indigenous Studies.

The third chapter "Dynamics of Marginalisation and Resistance in *Kocharethi* and 'Thenvarikka'" shall focus on exploring the antithetical concepts of marginality and resistance, particularly in the historical context of tribal people's exploitation by the outside forces, which had entered their native lands for the sake of economic exploitation. While unpacking the socio-cultural forces in tribal life in Kerala, the chapter examines the intervention of modernity, the exploitative

dominance of migrants, and the struggles and resilience of tribals in the Western Ghats.

The fourth chapter "Lived Experiences and Spatial Encounters in *Upara: An Outsider*" explores the lived experiences of the author, along with the various types of spatial terrain associated with the texts and their interactions. It also critically examines the ways in which tribal identity is molded by the interaction of overlapping identity categories, such as gender, caste, class, and tribe, as well as the power systems that exert influence over tribal identity from the outside.

The next chapter "Lived Space and Identity Assertion in *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* and 'The Adivasi Will Not Dance'" provides an exploration of the intricacies of lived space and identity assertion within the Santhal community, as well as the ways in which the tribals navigate a world situated against the backdrop of external forces, which constantly try to erase them.

The concluding chapter of the thesis analyses the various findings and inferences that surfaced over the course of the study. In an additional chapter titled "Recommendations", the limitations and further scope of the research area are documented.

Keywords: Tribal literature, Tribe/Adivasi, Lived Space, Lived Experience, Power, Ethnic Identity, Caste, Cultural Space, Marginality, Intersectionality.

Seeja H
Research Scholar

Dr Arunlal K
Research Guide &
Associate Professor of English

സംഗ്രഹം

'ഇന്ത്യൻ ഗോത്രസാഹിത്യത്തിലെ സാംസ്കാരിക ഇടവും വംശീയ സ്വത്വവും: നാരായൺ, മാനെ, ശേഖർ എന്നിവരുടെ കൃതികളെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള പഠനം ' എന്ന ഈ പ്രബന്ധം, ഇന്ത്യയിലെ പ്രമുഖരായ ഗോത്രവർഗ്ഗ എഴുത്തുകാരുടെ ഏറ്റവും പ്രധാനപ്പെട്ട രചനകളെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള അന്തർവൈജ്ഞാനിക പഠനമാണ്.ഇതിൽ സാംസ്കാരിക ഇടവും വംശീയ സ്വത്വവും തമ്മിലുള്ള സങ്കീർണ്ണമായ പരസ്പരബന്ധം പരിശോധിക്കുന്നു. ഗോത്രസാഹിത്യം ഒരു പുതിയ സാഹിത്യശാഖയാണ്. ഇതിന്റെ ഉല്പത്തിക്ക് പല കാരണങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ട്.ഇന്ത്യയുടെ വൈവിധ്യമാർന്ന ഭൂപ്രകൃതി ഒരു കാരണമാണ്. ഗോത്രവർഗ്ഗ എഴുത്തുകാർക്ക് ഔപചാരിക വിദ്യാഭ്യാസം ലഭിച്ചതിലൂടെ അവരുടെ അതിജീവനാനുഭവങ്ങൾ സാഹിത്യത്തിലൂടെ ആവിഷ്കരിക്കാൻ കഴിഞ്ഞു. അതുപോലെ, ഗോത്ര ജനതയുടെ തനത് ഭൂമിയിലേക്ക് പുറത്തുനിന്നുള്ള വ്യവസായ ശക്തികൾ കടന്നുകയറുന്നതിനെതിരെ സ്വത്വവും സംസ്കാരവും സംരക്ഷിക്കാൻ ലക്ഷ്യമിട്ടുള്ള പുതിയ സാമൂഹിക മുന്നേറ്റങ്ങളുടെ ആവിർഭാവം ഉണ്ടായി. ഇതെല്ലാം ഈ സാഹിത്യശാഖയുടെ ഉല്പത്തിക്ക് കാരണമായി.

പ്രബന്ധം ഏഴ് അധ്യായങ്ങളായി തിരിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നു. പ്രാരംഭ അധ്യായത്തിൽ പഠനത്തിന് ആവശ്യമായ പശ്ചാത്തല വിവരങ്ങൾ, അതിന്റെ ലക്ഷ്യങ്ങൾ, ഗവേഷണ ചോദ്യങ്ങൾ, രീതിശാസ്ത്രം, പ്രസക്തി എന്നിവ ഉൾക്കൊള്ളുന്നു. കൂടാതെ, ഈ ഭാഗത്ത് വിശകലനം ചെയ്യേണ്ട പ്രാഥമിക ഗ്രന്ഥങ്ങളുടെ സംഗ്രഹവും ചേർത്തിട്ടുണ്ട്.

രണ്ടാമത്തെ അധ്യായമായ "ഗോത്രസാഹിത്യത്തിന്റെ സാമൂഹികപശ്ചാത്തലം" എന്നത് ഗോത്രസാഹിത്യം എന്ന സാഹിത്യവിഭാഗത്തെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള ഒരു ഹ്രസ്വമായ ആമുഖം നൽകുന്നു. സബാൾട്ടേൺ സ്റ്റഡീസ്, സ്പേഷ്യൽ സ്റ്റഡീസ്, ഇൻഡിജിനസ് സ്റ്റഡീസ് എന്നീ മേഖലകളിൽ നിന്നുള്ള പ്രസക്തമായ ആശയങ്ങളെ മുൻനിർത്തി ഗോത്രസാഹിത്യത്തിൻന്റെ സാമൂഹിക പശ്ചാത്തലവും പ്രത്യയശാസ്ത്രങ്ങളും ചർച്ച ചെയ്തുകൊണ്ട് കൾച്ചറൽ സ്റ്റഡീസ്, വംശീയ സ്വത്വം എന്നിവയുടെ അടിസ്ഥാനപരമായ ആശയങ്ങളെക്കുറിച്ചും ഈ അധ്യായം ചർച്ച ചെയ്യുന്നു.

"കൊച്ചരേത്തിയിലേയും 'തേൻവരിക്ക'യിലേയും പാർശ്വവൽക്കരണത്തിന്റെയും ചെറുത്തു നിൽപ്പിന്റെയും നിലപാടുകൾ" എന്ന മൂന്നാമത്തെ അധ്യായം, പാർശ്വവൽക്കരണവും ചെറുത്തുനിൽപ്പും എന്ന വിപരീത ആശയങ്ങളെക്കുറിച്ചാണ് ചർച്ച ചെയ്യുന്നത്. പ്രത്യേകിച്ചും സാമ്പത്തിക ചൂഷണത്തിനായി തങ്ങളുടെ തനത് ഭൂമിയിലേക്ക് കടന്നുവന്ന ബാഹ്യശക്തികളാൽ ഗോത്രവർഗ്ഗക്കാർ ചൂഷണം ചെയ്യപ്പെട്ടതിന്റെ ചരിത്രപരമായ പശ്ചാത്തലത്തിൽ കേരളത്തിലെ ഗോത്രവർഗ്ഗക്കാരുടെ സാമൂഹിക-സാംസ്കാരിക ശക്തികളെക്കുറിച്ച് വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുന്നു. അതിനൊപ്പം ആധുനികതയുടെ ഇടപെടൽ,

കുടിയേറ്റക്കാരുടെ ചൂഷണാധിഷ്ഠിതമായ ആധിപത്യം, പശ്ചിമഘട്ടത്തിലെ ഗോത്രവർഗ്ഗക്കാരുടെ പോരാട്ടങ്ങളും അതിജീവനശേഷിയും എന്നിവയെയും ഈ അധ്യായം പരിശോധിക്കുന്നു.

നാലാമത്തെ അധ്യായമായ "ജീവിതാനുഭവങ്ങളും സ്ഥലപരമായ ഇടപെടലുകളും ഉപാര: ആൻ ഔട്ട്സൈഡർ' എന്ന കൃതിയിൽ " എഴുത്തുകാരന്റെ ജീവിതാനുഭവങ്ങളെയും അതുപോലെതന്നെ കൃതികളുമായി ബന്ധപ്പെട്ട വിവിധതരം സ്ഥലപരമായ ഭൂപ്രദേശങ്ങളെയും അവയുടെ പരസ്പരബന്ധത്തെയും വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുന്നു. കൂടാതെ, ലിംഗം, ജാതി, വർഗ്ഗം, ഗോത്രം എന്നിങ്ങനെയുള്ള സ്വത്വത്തിന്റെ വിവിധ തലങ്ങളുടെ പ്രതിപ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളാൽ ഗോത്രവർഗ്ഗ സ്വത്വം രൂപപ്പെടുന്നതെങ്ങനെയെന്നും, അതുപോലെ പുറത്തുനിന്നും ഗോത്രവർഗ്ഗ സ്വത്വത്തിൽ സ്വാധീനം ചെലുത്തുന്ന അധികാര വ്യവസ്ഥകളെക്കുറിച്ചും ഈ അധ്യായം വിമർശനാത്മകമായി വിലയിരുത്തുന്നു.

അടുത്ത അധ്യായമായ "ദ മിസ്റ്റീരിയസ് എയിൽ മെന്റ് ഒഫ് രുബി ബാസ്കി, 'ദ ആദിവാസി വിൽ നോട്ട് ഡാൻസ് എന്നീ കൃതികളിലെ ജീവിതഇടവും സ്വത്വവാദവും" എന്നത് സാന്താൾ സമൂഹത്തിന്റെ ജീവിത ഇടത്തെയും സ്വത്വവാദത്തെയും കുറിച്ചുള്ള പഠനമാണ്. ഗോത്രവർഗ്ഗക്കാരെ തുടർച്ചയായി ഇല്ലാതാക്കാൻ ശ്രമിക്കുന്ന ബാഹ്യശക്തികളുടെ പശ്ചാത്തലത്തിൽ അവർ എങ്ങനെയാണ് ലോകത്തെ അഭിമുഖീകരിക്കുന്നതെന്നും ഈ അധ്യായം വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുന്നു.

പ്രബന്ധത്തിന്റെ ഉപസംഹാര അധ്യായം, പഠനത്തിലുടനീളം ഉയർന്നുവന്ന വിവിധ കണ്ടെത്തലുകളും നിഗമനങ്ങളും വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുന്നു. "നിർദ്ദേശങ്ങൾ" എന്ന അധിക അധ്യായത്തിൽ, ഗവേഷണത്തിന്റെ പരിമിതികളും ഭാവി സാധ്യതകളും രേഖപ്പെടുത്തിയിട്ടുണ്ട്.

സൂചക പദങ്ങൾ: ടൈബൽ സാഹിത്യം, ടൈബ്/ആദിവാസി, ഇടം, അനുഭവം, അധികാരം, വംശീയ സ്വത്വം, ജാതി, സാംസ്കാരിക ഇടം, പാർശ്വവൽക്കരണം, ഇന്റർസെക്ഷണാലിറ്റി.

സീജ എച്ച്
ഗവേഷക

ഡോ. അരുൺ ലാൽ കെ.
ഗവേഷക മാർഗ്ഗദർശി

A NOTE ON DOCUMENTATION

For the purpose of documentation, the Ninth edition of the MLA Handbook is used.

Contents

Chapter I
Introduction

The study of tribal literature is a relatively new field of academic inquiry, one which emerged, in fact, only as recently as the final decades of the twentieth century. Tribal voices from a number of different geographical terrains provide the valuable testimony of using literary means to raise numerous social concerns. Their textual discourses, embedded with a sense of tribal consciousness, have provided considerably significant insight into their philosophy of existence and systems of knowledge. The primary motive lying behind tribal literature is not just to refer back to the cultural past but also to create a new space that would enable one to achieve social mobility and personal upliftment. It also aims to establish itself as a new literary canon, as most erstwhile studies, being predominantly non-tribal in origin, highlight a largely misrepresented tribal identity.

The present thesis analyses the interplay of cultural space and ethnic identity in Indian tribal writings, particularly in the works of Laxman Mane, along with Narayan and Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, by adopting an interdisciplinary approach. The study focuses on central issues, such as the formation of tribal identity and its negotiation with mainstream society. It also attempts to examine how each of the distinct lived spaces of the tribal individual concretizes the social relations making up tribal identity. Terms such as “ethnic identity” and “cultural space” will be conceptualized in the present analysis through the use of relevant insights from spatial studies, subaltern studies, and indigenous studies. Although spatial studies and indigenous studies emerged in different global contexts, their

correlation is particularly significant in the Indian context because the experiences of tribal communities in India have been deeply connected to the spaces which they inhabit. Their experiences underscore issues of power, caste, marginalization, and the realities of their lived spaces and environments. Furthermore, in the specific context of tribal writings, analysing the relationship between cultural space and identity provides a new area of study.

The present thesis primarily aims to understand the representation of tribals' need for social justice in the select works. Through looking critically at the global context of tribal literature in general and the writings of the select writers in particular, the present study attempts to delineate how tribal language emerges as a form of resistance and gives an upward thrust for social movement. It also seeks to analyse gender roles in tribal literature. Given the centrality of the relation between cultural space and ethnic identity, the study discusses issues such as the tribal writers' concern about their identity, as well as the use of spatial modalities and ethnic identity as tools of cultural resistance. The central premise of the thesis posits that tribal literature constitutes a unique literary canon, which stands apart from other subaltern literatures in terms of its contextual, thematic, and perceptual aspects, given the range of issues with which it grapples. The works chosen for the study include the following: Laxman Mane's autobiography *Upara: An Outsider*, Narayan's novel *Kocharethi* and the short story, "Thenvarikka", Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's novel *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, and the latter's short story "The Adivasi Will not Dance" from the short story collection of the same name.

Critical studies in the past have already touched upon tribal folklore and oral literature. However, tribal writings open a window to the less discussed world of tribal life, allowing one to revise and analyse the problems encountered by tribals. The present study seeks to bridge the gaps in addressing tribal space and ethnic identity, as there have been very few studies which focus on literature based on tribal writings. The study of tribals has been a subject of interest in various fields, including Economics, History, Sociology, and Anthropology. However, an examination of tribal life through their writings remains unexplored in the domain of Indian literature. In recent years, academia seems to have shifted its focus to tribal writing.

G N Devy is a respected figure in tribal studies and has edited several books on the subject, including *Indigeneity: Culture and Representation: Proceedings of the 2008 Chotro Conference on Indigenous Languages, Culture, and Society*, *Knowing Differently: The Challenge of the Indigenous*, *Narrating Nomadism: Tales of Recovery and Resistance*, *Painted Words: An Anthology of Tribal Literature* and *Being Adivasi: Existence, Entitlements, Exclusion*. The articles in these books address various issues which indigenous people face, such as the history of conflict, the destruction of traditional culture, language disparities, the obscurity of highly intellectual traditions, exclusion from export transactions, and the inability to access plant resources.

Studying indigenous people's literature, culture, and society can help one to reconsider the representation of their studies. The limitations inherent in the term “literature” necessitate that the term be redefined and that its organizational

affiliation with script and writing be brought to light. The articles revisit the primary belief in language creation, whether spoken or written, thereby highlighting the understanding of the richness of indigenous literature, culture, and society. Devy's *A Nomad Called Thief: Reflections on Adivasi Silence* discusses the complexities of Adivasi life and the ways in which mainstream literary projects are to be contrasted with the interests of the tribes.

Virginius Xaxa is an eminent academician and scholar of sociology who has written extensively on tribal studies. In his works *State, Society, and Tribes* and *Social Exclusion and Adverse Inclusion: Development and Deprivation of Adivasis in India*, he seeks to revise the concepts of "tribe" and "tribal society" in the context of state policy and socio-cultural developments of post-independence India. These works also focus on the themes of exclusion and inclusion of Adivasis in India, emphasizing their developmental issues and impediments. *Literature from Northeast India: Beyond the Centre–Periphery Debate*, edited by K. M. Baharul Islam, showcases the diverse literary traditions from India's Northeast and evaluates the hegemony of language and culture over ethnicity. The book also identifies language forms, cultural symbols, and metaphors that articulate the conflicts among the tribal groups. The history of the Adivasis' struggles in identity formation and their adherence to economic and political conceptions of marginality are thoroughly explored in *Contemporary Adivasi Writings in India: Shifting Paradigms*, edited by Dr Rajshree Trivedi and Dr Rupali Burk. The second chapter in this book, titled "Othered in One's Land: Adivasi Writing in Kerala" by Catherine Thankkamma, recognises Adivasis' emerging consciousness, history, and sense of community.

These books are essential in understanding the nuances of Adivasi literature and the challenges which these communities face. Their rich treasures of knowledge and culture make them distinct, and these books help one appreciate their experiences, which in turn helps contribute to their liberation. Anand Mahananda's book, titled *Lo(k)cal Knowledge: Perceptions on Dalit, Tribal and Folk Literature*, offers a unique perspective on Mane's autobiography *Upara* while providing valuable insights into Narayan's *Kocharethi*. Another impressive work is Margaret Ch Zama's *Emerging Literatures from Northeast India: The Dynamics of Culture, Society, and Identity*, which constructs a literary paradigm of the Northeast and highlights the problems of identity that persist due to the lingering effects of the experience of colonialism.

In Ratheesh P's thesis *Tribal Narratives as Counter-discourse: A Select Study*, he examines the stereotypical representation of tribals in mainstream discourses. The thesis recognises the effectiveness of tribal narratives as counter narratives responding to widely held stereotypes. Ramesh Landage's thesis *A Cultural Study of Dalit Autobiographies in India with Special Reference to Sharankumar Limbale's The Outcaste, Laxman Mane's The Outsider, Siddalingaiah's Ooru Keri, and Omprakash Valmiki's Joothan* explores the cultural significance of Laxman Mane's *The Outsider*. The study delves into the history of marginality and cultural assertion, highlighting the roots of Dalits' humiliation and injustice. Cultural symbols regarding the life of the Kaikadi community represent the everyday existence of the tribe and their stories of humiliation and oppression. He emphasises that just as the anti-caste struggle provided a medium for the Dalit

revolution to be realized, Dalit autobiographies serve as a powerful medium for their representation. In his study "*Deconstruction of Self and Identity in Select Male Dalit Autobiographies*," Teddy C Anthappai analyses Mane's autobiography using Dalit ideologies. In the fourth chapter of the thesis, the scholar aligns Mane's identity with that of the Dalits because of his alliance with Dalit political organisations. Mane was dissatisfied with the prevailing conditions of the social structure. Kaikadi cultural forms convey their uniqueness, unintentionally pushing them to the margin because of their very cultural variance. By analysing Dalit ideologies, it was proposed that these ideologies make them the centre of the study, relocating the centre and the self in the process. The study aimed to decentralise the literary canon through individual identity, which constantly combats culture and reshapes the stereotyped figure. It also comments on the existence of self-narratives that move these narrators from the margin to the centre.

Given the differences in geography from one region to another, the concept of tribal identity is largely based on distinct socio-cultural perspectives. The very uniqueness of these varied tribal identities produces alternative spaces for the tribal writers to question and examine the obstacles lying in their path to social justice. The inherent pluralism of ethnic discourse must have been one of the primary reasons for the emerging academic interest in tribal life and literature to have gained traction in recent years. Multiple readings of this literature explore the intersections of the layers of tribal life in their subtle cadence.

The term "tribe" gained currency in the first half of the 20th century. It was first used in colonial administration through the Government of India Act of 1935. C

R Roy, in his article "Adivasis of India: A History of discrimination, Conflict and Resistance" in *This is Our Homeland* comments:

> 'Scheduled Tribes' in India are generally considered to be adivasi, literally meaning 'Indigenous people' or 'original inhabitants'; though the term Scheduled Tribe (STs) is not coterminous with adivasi. ST is an administrative term used for the purpose of 'administering' certain specific constitutional privileges, and for the protection and benefit of specific sections of people considered historically disadvantaged and backwards. (16)

Thus, although the term "Scheduled Tribe" denotes the tribal population of India collectively, it is not a word that succeeds in encapsulating the cultural components of such an identity. The relation between the terms "Indigenous" and "Adivasi" is explicated in the article "Tribes as Indigenous People of India" as follows:

> The term indigenous people, though of recent coinage at the international level, has been in use in India for a long time. In fact, the social workers, missionaries and political activists have been using the term 'adivasi', the Indian language term for the indigenous people, freely to refer to the tribal people since the turn of the present century. The term, in conjunction with other related terms such as aborigines, autochthonous, etc, has also been extensively used by scholars and administrators in their writings and reports. The term was used mainly as a mark of identification and differentiation that is to mark out a group of people different in physical features, language, religion, custom, sociological organisation etc. (3590)

In this sense, many scholars in India use the two terms "tribal" and "Adivasi" interchangeably. This thesis also uses both of these terms, just as writers such as Narayan and Shekhar use both terms in their works. It bears mentioning that tribal peoples lack any universally accepted signifier but are instead referred to by different terms in different countries, such as "Native Americans" in the United States of America, "First Nations" in Canada, and "Aboriginals" in Australia. Most of their literary cultures were preserved through oral literature, which remains rich in its cultural flavour. Each tribal group developed indigenous forms of ideology and knowledge systems pertaining to their land and culture. H. S. Chandalia explicated this relation between land and culture as follows:

> The literature of the unlettered communities derives its strength from the Nature around them, the collective community life, agricultural practices, the pagan faith in the forces and phenomena of nature as deities and the little struggles they undergo trying to safeguard their asset and faith (13).

In tribal writings, the interplay of cultural space and ethnic identity advance considerable changes in reconstructing the notion of tribal identity. In non-tribal writings, tribal identity is commonly constructed as an overly stereotypical figure, appertaining to the popular imagination of the society. On the other hand, tribal literature focuses on reconstructing such spaces and identities enforced upon them by centres of power. In *Contemporary Adivasi Writings in India: Shifting Paradigms,* Rajshree Trivedi and Rupalee Burke observe that "writings by Adivasis, therefore, are a means of assertion against the socio-cultural oppression and hegemony they have had to suffer owing to their different status considered inferior"

(11). Recent literary studies have indicated that tribal literature continues to have a broad scope. In tribal writings, the goal of reframing identity is achieved through the cultural space which involves utilizing various spaces by cultural practices and expressions. In the article "Cultural Space – a Conceptual Deliberation and Characterization as Urban Space," Farida Nilufar argues that cultural space defines the location of an individual (or group) and is concerned with both people and their environment within a range of natural and cultural values (30). Cultural space refers to the physical or virtual environments where cultural practices, traditions, and expressions take place. It is an integral product of the cultural dimension of social life, reflecting the values, beliefs, and customs of a particular community or society. Tribal writings mark and endorse the tribals' existence and experience in such literary discourses. It could also be understood as a form of literary resistance to various forms of oppression and cultural erasure.

Ethnic identity gets formulated when an individual becomes, rather unconsciously, an essential part of an ethnic group. Through structuring one's feelings and thoughts, ethnic identity develops one's perception and behaviour. By these means, tribal identity is formed from one's ethnic background; as a result, the space created and restructured from this cultural background is deeply fused with one's identity. Tribal life is intertwined with real and imagined spatial structures, which are explored in concepts such as cultural space and ethnic identity. The process of cultural transition never ceases to manifest itself in the life of individuals, and new forms of the same emerge every day. It is, therefore, pertinent to analyse tribal life in the modern era using tribal writings as the primary data for cultural

space and ethnic identity. Cultural space articulates different layers of represented and symbolic space. Social transformation is possible in these spaces and everyday practices that retain some patterns of routine that in turn form a sense of identity. Ethnic identity sometimes embodies a series of cultural values inherited from one's ancestors, such that a cultural space is created when a community establishes its culture within a specific address. Foregrounding the sociopolitical relevance of cultural space, Gopal Guru suggests that Orientalism, the stereotyped representation of Asian peoples and cultures from a colonialist perspective, is a social necessity for Dalits, tribals, and OBCs to become the subject of their own thinking and to resist being objectified by others (*The Cracked Mirror* 25). In his words, this Oriental ideology that marginalises the tribal identity and cultural space can also act as an impetus to trigger the tribals' journey from their internalised object positions to exercise new subject positions. By redefining their status both as a community and as individuals, tribals express their resistance to the dominant culture. Tribal writings, from this angle, challenge the centrality of the dominant view and transform into a new canon in literature as a result.

Identity and space are not static or singular but multidimensional and vary according to the power structures which they change, assimilate, modify, and resist. Processes of adaptation and assimilation, along with socio-economic policies that promote a new way of life, result in changes in tribal customs and traditions, often resulting in the extinction of an earlier way of life. It is a complex and nuanced phenomenon that deserves further exploration and contemplation. It becomes "[t]he literature of a search for identity", as Ganga Sahay Meena states, or a literature "of

exposing the past and present forms of exploitation by outsiders, and of threats to tribal identity and existence, and resistance" (Meena). Through deconstructing the idea of tribal identity derived from the stereotypical figure, tribal narratives challenge the predominantly static figure of the tribal and promote tribal-centred thought and doctrines instead. It is vital to consider tribal space and identity through the lens of tribal literature in order to contextualise the constructed tribal figure. A focus on space and identity sheds light on how they constantly develop a language of resistance to establish their identity. Their writings aim to open a social dialogue about tribals' issues and struggles.

Tribal writings focus on the aspects that contribute to the formation of ethnic identity and cultural space. These narratives open up a space in which to converse about tribal identity, ideology, and agency in a rigorous manner in order to ensure the reassertion of their social status and culture. Representation and tribal consciousness are significant issues of the tribal people, and viable alternatives from the tribal writers are highlighted in the study. Furthermore, these narratives foreground each of the tribes as a whole society with region-specific issues that affect the contours of their overall identity.

One who embarks on such a study should bear in mind Virginius Xaxa's observation that "the terms of reference or description in tribal studies should not be caste, peasant, or social heterogeneity, but rather groups or communities, such as regional communities" (*State, Society, and Tribes Issues in Post Colonial India* 26). A tribe is a whole society like any other society, with its own language, culture, territory, customs, and so on. This implies that, contrary to the generalised idea in

tribal studies given thus far, castes or peasants form subsets of the tribal in general. The tribals are communities or societies incorporating castes and peasants, for the latter do not comprise the whole society but instead form only one particular element of the whole. Analysing cultural spaces and ethnic identities provides a way to unveil the unexplored world of tribals. Gopal Guru also discusses the idea of cultural space in the realm of religion as follows: "Bodies are turned into cultural spaces that the Brahmanical system could rule over, could write on, and regulate this rule" (*The Cracked Mirror* 86). In this manner, the tribal body becomes an active site on which the external Brahmanical religious order acts, synthesises, and transforms itself, reinforcing the former's objectified status. In addition to the notion of cultural space, ethnic identity is a concept that deserves close analysis. Research on these concepts uses tribals and their life as a text of sorts. The study uses analytic, referential, descriptive, and argumentative methods with a focus on social justice and integrity with regard to tribals in the background. The hypothesis of the present study is that ethnic identity is closely related to the lived cultural space of the tribals and that tribal writings give voice to their unique identity through representation, resistance, and resilience.

Each of the select writers belongs to a different territory within India and articulates different cultural experiences from various geographical pockets of the nation, a combination of factors which makes each of their works unique. Laxman Mane, the tribal writer from Maharashtra, a veteran with poignant experience and natural skills, visualises the Kaikadi tribal life in the villages of Maharashtra. Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar articulates the Santhali lives of Jharkhand, one of the

most populous tribes in India. He narrates how the Santhali villages are bound with magic and superstitions and how the acquisition of land for development compelled them to shed their tribal consciousness. Narayan, the most celebrated tribal writer from Kerala, eloquently speaks about the Mala Araya tribes, a community that has undergone significant cultural transitions over the years. Narayan identifies the social conditions of the Mala Araya community and their efforts to achieve the status of an educated cultural minority group within Kerala. Shekhar, Narayan, and Mane attempt to articulate the untold stories of their respective tribes, with a view to usher in a social change inside and outside tribal lives in order to reconstruct the tribal space and identity with tribal consciousness. As a result, they do not create an imaginary world but instead depict a world based on real lived experiences. Tribal writings, especially those based on empirical evidence, attest to the fact that experiences of discrimination and inequality have been internalised in tribal societies through various spaces. The chief concern of the present study is to analyse how the tribal writers rewrite their tribal history that has been distorted and misrepresented by mainstream literature. The five works to be discussed have been chosen as the literary groundwork based on their representation of tribal lives in different regions of India.

Narayan, the first Adivasi novelist from Kerala, was born in 1940. He published many novels, including *Ooralikkudi*, *Chingarum Kuttalum*, *Vandanam*, *Tholkunnavar Aaraanur*, *Ee Vazhiyil Aalere Illa*, *Thiraskrutharude Nalea*, *Manasum Dhehavum Kondu Njan Ninnea*, *Pennungal Paniyunna Nagaram*, and *Vannalakal*, as well as a number of short stories, such as “Nissahayante Nilavili”,

“Pela Marutha”, “Kadhakal– Narayan”, and “Narayante Theranjedutha Kadhakal”. Throughout his career, he received numerous awards for his contributions to literature. Narayan's *Kocharethi* is the first dissenting voice of the tribal to be heard in Kerala literary circles. Catherine Thankamma translated this new voice into English. Narayan retraces the chronicle of Mala Araya’s life and the migration of Christian and Muslim communities into the land of the Arayas. Because the Mala Arayas were an agrarian people, the tribals immediately responded with transitions into cultural modernity, which helped them cope with the dominant communities rather than other tribal communities in Kerala. Kunjipennu and Kochuraman, the central characters, represent the tribals in Kerala, who not only faced exploitation from mainstream society but were also dispossessed from their space and culture. He makes the argument that the compulsive participation of other communities in the Araya's life in the role of owners of their possessions is not due to compassion but was instead motivated by a desire for power. This could also be seen as symptoms of institutional racism.

Like *Upara*, *Kocharethi* touches upon the constant pressure and presence of religious supremacy and the cultural hegemony which forces minority groups to melt into society. In *Kocharethi*, Narayan explores how modernity impacts life in the Western Ghats of Kerala. The Mala Araya community neither rejected nor embraced modernity entirely. Instead, they faced, resisted, and selectively adopted cultural practices from the modern mainstream culture. The writer suggests, however, that the cost of implementing these changes was higher than the benefits they received from modernity. According to Narayan, the arrival of the outsiders led

to the exploitation of their land, while education resulted in the alienation of their children from their families, native places, and culture. Additionally, new agricultural practices proved to be ineffective and unproductive in the fertile soil of the Western Ghats. Narayan's "Thenvarikka" is a short story from the collection *Cries in the Wilderness*, translated by K M Sherrif. It is a story about the relationship between Man and Nature and the conflict between old and new generations. The story evinces the precaution that hands of Man create hazards to Nature which, in turn, end human life. It also opens a discussion on the varying perceptions of Nature from the vantage point of the old and young generations.

Laxman Bapu Mane, widely known as Laxman Mane, was born in Maharashtra in 1949. He is celebrated for his autobiography *Upara*, which is well-read and acknowledged for articulating marginalised lives. Mane was an active member of various social organizations and is acclaimed for his works, including *Kital, Band Darvaja, Bhatkyache Bharud,* (a compilation of speeches) *Palavarach Jag, Khel Sadetin Takkyancha, Yashvantrao Chavan Aathavani Akhyavika, Udhavasta,* and *Vimuktayan*. Surveying the tribal world, Mane deconstructs the popular notions surrounding tribal identity and culture and rejects the idea that the latter are opposed to development. Mane's Sahitya Akademi award-winning autobiography *Upara* was written in Marathi in 1980 and translated into English in 1997 by A. K. Kamat as *Upara: An Outsider*. Though it was known as one of the earliest writings from a tribal writer, this autobiography is often categorised in academia under Dalit Studies. Mane questions the colonial concepts of Hinduism and the notion of purity. Before this, Mane had published articles in *Sadhana* and a

serialised column called “Banda Darwaja” (The Closed Door) in the daily *Sakal* from Pune. He belongs to the nomadic tribe Kaikadi of Maharashtra and is the first person in his community to have received formal education. The autobiography addresses questions such as poverty, illiteracy, superstition, lack of social awareness, and the perils of caste hierarchy. Being nomadic, the Kaikadi people did not own land. Right from childhood, Mane was a victim of discrimination, which made him question everything around him. He was born in Somanthali village, where he encountered many forms of marginalisation, including the denial of fundamental rights and humanity. Collecting cane and making baskets were the primary occupations of his parents.

The first part of the autobiography ends with a turning point in his life: his entry into the world of education. The insecurities of nomadic life instilled a sense of aversion towards academic institutions and formal education in Mane. It was the compulsion of his father and his fear that if he did not go to school, his father would punish his mother, which forced him to study. Later, he developed a taste for education. However, school was not a comfortable place for tribal children in those days. He had to face marginalization not only from students but also from teachers. Moreover, the language used in school was different from the language which Mane spoke at home. His journey from an illiterate, silenced identity to that of an empowered tribal was not smooth but instead marked a consistent intervention into the dominant space. Shifting from one place to another interrupted his education many times. Before moving from one village to another, the villagers examined his family’s bags to find out whether they had stolen anything. His community was one

of the tribal groups that were branded as criminals, though such a branding never made him hesitate to represent the community in his later life as a renowned social worker and activist. Throughout his writings, the image of hunger, the typical picture in many tribal and Dalit writings, profoundly hurts the readers. The characters begged for food and ate stale food received from the villagers. Such traumatic experiences did not cause Mane to refrain from raising his voice against the social and cultural injustices faced by the community. Along with his journey to obtain an identity, he describes the religious practices of his community in great detail. Festivals were vital as they were the only option for them to see all their relatives. Goats were sacrificed, food was shared, and the rituals with similarities to those of the Hindu religion were conducted. After the festival of Kalubai, elders collected fees and solved disputes between people in the community panchayat. Basket making never materialised in wages and, often, the tribals worked hard for many hours only to receive some chillies, stale *bakharies*, and groundnuts. Mane's and his family's quest to carve out a space in society was thwarted on many occasions.

The influence of various Dalit social activists on Mane over the years helped him rethink and formulate his authentic tribal identity. Rambhau, a Dalit activist from his own village, was a major source of inspiration for Mane. His questioning voice that talked back to upper caste people invoked in the young Mane a new perspective that they should also have the right to question atrocities. Mane confesses that he was not a brilliant student, but starvation and the quest to do something worthwhile gradually made him study hard and do menial jobs to earn

money. The autobiography also traces the life of other tribal communities, such as Pingla, Vaids, Makadwale, Vadaris, Kolatis, Gondhali, Gosavis, Dunbar, and Mang-Garudies. The text also addresses the fact that the practice of child marriage was prevalent in tribal communities. One of the reasons why Mane's father insisted on his sons getting formally educated could be traced back to his experience of severe forms of exploitation. In this way, the autobiography simultaneously narrates the tribal space, cultural practices, and discrimination, whatever its sources might be, giving due attention to the rights of tribes.

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar is a doctor by profession. Born in 1983, he belongs to the young generation of contemporary tribal writers. He has published several works, primarily using the English language to shed light on the lives of marginalized communities, especially the Santhali people. His first published work is *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2014). He has also released a collection of short stories titled *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, as well as novels such as *Jwala Kumar and the Gift of Fire: Adventures in Champakbagh, My Father's Garden, Who's There, Sumi Budhi* and *Sugi*. Additionally, he translated a Hindi work titled *I Named My Sister Silence* (Kaale Adhyaay) by Manoj Rupda. *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, according to Shekhar, is the story of five generations of a Santhali family living in Kadamdihi and its neighbouring villages. The novel is divided into twenty parts, in which the first sentence of each part is italicised and introduces the major incident in brief form. The novel explores the daily lives of Santhals, with their relative degree of personal freedom and choice, intertwined with their myths and legends. The relationships among the characters in the story

contribute to the inner conflict in tribal life: the most important characters include Putki and the various members of her extended family, such as her father Somai haram, her husband Khorda *haram*, her daughter-in-law Rupi, Rupi's husband Sido, his brother Doso, Rupi's son Jaipal, Bishu, Phuchu and Jaipal's children, which represent the five generations. Other important characters include Gurubari, Sido's mistress, and her husband, Bairam Master, along with Dulari, Doso's wife, Saagen, their son, and Rupali, Bishu's wife. Throughout the many riveting accounts of tribal life, the writer comes across as open and candid. Buoyed by a zest for life, relationships, and two women's search for identity, the novel vividly depicts the past and the present of tribal life in the village.

The Adivasi Will Not Dance is an anthology of ten stories. Shekhar keenly observes the social space of Adivasis in the last story "The Adivasi Will Not Dance". He recounts how power decides and structures tribal life, especially in the regions which were acquired for development projects. Monopolistic powers that hold greater and vested interests are shown to intrude into the tribal space, leading to the failure of democracy. The story draws and juxtaposes the past and the current realities of tribal lives, creating complex perceptions. Beginning with a rather curious title, the short story strongly presents Santhal voices negotiating a highly contested place, in the historical backdrop of the legal policies implemented by the bureaucracy. Godda, one of the districts in Jharkhand, is the chief setting of the story, and the choice of such a setting serves well to discuss contemporary tribal life in agrarian territories. The intervention of dominant groups with their biased sense of modernity and unjust policies in tribal areas accelerated their resistance to

existing inequalities, thereby leading them to seek to rectify the misconceived images of the tribe. Shekhar provides minute details about how migration and industrialisation affect tribal life, and the story comprises a coherent introduction to villages in Jharkhand, as well as the coal-mining areas with more slums. Mangal Murmu, a 60-year-old man, laments and resists outsiders' interventions using his musical skill as a weapon. In a concerned tone, he talks about how the Santhal lost their privileges and were forced to silently agree to allow government projects to be implemented on their land. As a new state, Jharkhand's development demanded financial support and the "silenced" tribals succumbed to the will of their state for the same reason. Denial of one's possessions, land, language, art, and culture could certainly be conceived as an act of symbolic genocide. At the same time, there is a commercialisation of tribal culture, as is evident in their art forms becoming an indispensable part of both formal and informal functions in Jharkhand, thereby acquiring a capitalistic market value.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters, including the introduction and the conclusion. The introductory chapter deals with the background of the study, objectives, research questions, methodology, the significance of the study, and a summary of the texts taken as primary materials. The second chapter "Contextualizing Tribal Literature" provides a brief description of tribal literature, as well as its present contexts and ideologies. It also discusses the fundamental concepts of cultural space and ethnic identity through the lens of some of the relevant concepts employed in subaltern studies, spatial studies, and indigenous studies. Therefore, the five texts chosen for the study seek out the unresolved crisis

of the tribals by considering different time frames and regions. This chapter examines tribal literature in a broader sense by critically evaluating Native American literature, Aboriginal literature from Australia, and First Nations literature from Canada. In addition, it evaluates the various sociopolitical and cultural contexts in which the Indian tribal literature has evolved. It also analyses the multiple perspectives discussed in Indian tribal literature. The chapter also examines notable Indian tribal writers, the characteristics of their writings, and the way in which they interact with mainstream literature, both through non-tribal writers and by increasing the visibility of tribal narratives in the literary world. Moreover, the chapter also places importance on tribal movements in framing tribal identity.

The third chapter "Dynamics of Marginalisation and Resistance in *Kocharethi* and 'Thenvarikka'" focuses on the themes of marginality and resistance. While unpacking the sociocultural forces at work in tribal life in Kerala, this chapter shows how the writer critically depicts the struggles and resilience of the Mala Araya community. The chapter analyses their social, economic, and geographical isolation and the effects thereof. It examines how the intersectionality of tribal identities gets restructured with the arrival of migrants in the Western Ghats. It also seeks to understand the impact of modernity as seen in the dominant, exploitative labour systems which push the tribals into the peripheries, as well as their resistance by means of upholding tradition. It analyses how the dominant culture seeks to alter or erase their identity and how the Mala Araya articulates the subtle forms of resistance to escape from systemic oppression. The representation of female

characters with respect to their male counterparts that contribute to their collective identity is also brought to light.

The next chapter "Lived Experiences and Spatial Encounters in *Upara: An Outsider* pays attention to the lived experience and social space in Mane's *Upara: An Outsider* and its social relevance. It explores the lived experiences of the writer Laxman Mane, from his autobiography in various spatial terrains, as well as their interactions. It also examines how experiences influence personal and social values, norms, and practices, and help to develop their perspectives. It critically studies how overlapping identities, such as gender, caste, class, and tribe accelerate his miserable plight. The text leads one to look into how those social norms, values, and behaviours enabled him to question authority and impart a sense of free will to subaltern lives. It also explores how the power system moulds tribal identity.

The fifth chapter "Lived Space and Identity Assertion in *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* and "The Adivasi Will Not Dance" is an exploration of the tribal ways of coping with the changing situation through their lived space. This chapter examines the intricacies of lived space and identity assertion within the Santhal community, as well as how the tribe navigates the world in which a backdrop of external forces constantly tries to erase their cultural identity. It also explores the Santhals' challenge to assert their identity in the face of invisibility and to resist oppression in their lived spaces. It tries to find out how tribal lives and villages have become sites of conflict between tradition and modernity, as well as conflicts regarding the societal expectations and policies that gradually turn fertile villages into barren lands. Adivasis resist and reject all imposed definitions,

expectations, and displacement. The chapter “Conclusion” analyses the various findings and inferences that surfaced during the study and the final chapter provides the limitations and further scope of the research area.

Since the primary texts have been penned by tribal writers themselves, the present study analyses how the works put forward an authentic version of their tribal life in all its nuances. The various ways of refuting the stereotyping and gross misrepresentation of tribal identity and culture are thoroughly examined. The study thus foregrounds the diversity, plurality and richness of different tribal cultures as found in the select works. It also studies the conflict between the tribal and non-tribal forces, making use of an interconnected analysis from subaltern studies, indigenous studies, and spatial studies. The study in general contributes to the larger area of tribal studies, along with tracing the historical trajectory of tribal literature in India.

Chapter II

Contextualising Tribal Literature

An analysis of Native American literature, Aboriginal literature from New Zealand and Australia, and First Nations literature from Canada is essential in order to contextualise tribal literature from across the globe. Likewise, the present thesis focuses on the emergence of tribal literature in India, connecting it to subaltern studies. Following this, the chapter briefly explains the work of notable tribal writers in India. It also examines tribal movements and the ways in which these agitations and socio-political arenas have laid the groundwork for developing tribal consciousness. Finally, the study focuses on cultural space and ethnic identity by analysing key concepts such as power, caste, marginality, lived experience, and lived space.

The literature from the Fourth World is a complex mixture of heterogeneous voices from many different regions, representing a wide range of resistance strategies from various languages and cultures. The term "Fourth World" was coined by the Canadian Aboriginal political leader George Manuel and the Canadian journalist Michael Posluns in their book *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality*. The term refers to the marginalised and disposed indigenous peoples of former colonies who struggle to retain their cultural identity. Globally, it has evolved from multiple places rather than being rooted in one location. Initially intended to celebrate an unrecognised cultural history, the corpus of ethnic writing later evolved into a potent strategy to resist hegemonic cultural and social discourses. Before the 1960s, the mainstream literary world was unaware of this new canon of writing. It addresses

issues related to land dispossession, the atrocities endured by tribals, the relationship between Man and Nature, stereotyping, and identity politics. A strong and deep-rooted connection to the past creates the foundation of this literature, based on a probe into the ethnic origins.

Tribal people possess a repertoire of oral literature that continues to preserve their indigenous systems of knowledge and cultural practices. Indigenous literature, be it oral or written, documents raw experiences and illustrates the trials and tribulations of tribal life. As tribal literature emerges from different countries, groups, and times, it cannot be homogenised into a single, uniform genre. Tribals carry other names in different nations, such as Aborigines, First Nations, Indigenous, Janajathis, Vanavasi, and Adivasi; likewise, through their writings, they are able to share their everyday experiences among their diverse cultures. After black writings, indigenous writings have grown to become the world's largest humanitarian agency for peace. In the introduction to the book entitled *Narrating Nomadism: Tales of Recovery and Resistance,* G N Devy remarks that the academic study of indigenous writings might "include the study of numerous marginalized languages, their literary traditions, the aesthetic framework of those traditions, the origins of communities, their mythologies and histories, their visual representations, artistic practices and art criticism, and the politics and the ideologies of these communities" (3–4). Consequently, academic circles have switched from studying monoculture to multicultures, from studying mainstream literature to multiple kinds of writings. This avenue to globalise tribal literature has also provided a step forward to protect human rights.

It is crucial to comprehensively understand indigenous literature worldwide before analysing Adivasi literature in India, as the nuances of indigenous literature are rooted in different nations. Native American literature has played a prominent role in shaping the landscape of indigenous literature globally. In the introductory chapter, "Post-Renaissance Indigenous American Literary Studies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature*, James H Cox and Daniel Heath Justice argue that "The field emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970's" (3). It is argued so because the Native American Renaissance which produced the earliest form of Indigenous literature existed for a period extending from approximately 1968 to 1995, according to American literary critic Kenneth Lincoln. The formation of the World Council of Indigenous People in 1975 in Port Alberni, British Columbia, Canada was a landmark event in indigenous history. Traditionally, indigenous people took pride in preserving their stories through oral traditions, using songs, spells, and charms to preserve their customs and pass them down from one generation to the next. Cox and Justice asserted:

> Indigenous literature is written, as Weaver notes, 'that the People might live' in a world in which Indigenous people are constantly represented as always on the margin of modernity and on the verge of disappearing. Native American and Indigenous literature serve as an affirmation of a robust indigenous cultural present. In the face of continued state coercion on this robust literary Indigeneity – as conveyed by indigenous voice in films, novels, short stories, autobiographies, plays, poem, songs and oral stories – is also inherently, although polymorphously political. (10-1)

As seen in the Introduction of *The Indigenous Contexts of Native America Literature*, "mixed-race identities claimed by Native American writers and their protagonists stabilise stereotypes" and those mixed-blood characters disrupt the racial, gender, and sexual norms of the settler colonial society (Madsen). For a long time, Native Indian literature was an unwritten and anonymous genre to the literary world. However, beginning from the late nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century onward, notable writers such as Sherman Alexie, N Scott Momaday, Louise Erdich, Leslie Marmon Silko, James Welch, Paula Gunn Allen, Joy Harjo, and Simon J Ortiz began to write about values such as equality, acceptance, and silence. Their work attributed human characteristics and emotions to geography and topography. Additional features common in Native American literature include the presence of female gods and the prevalence of genres in which stories intertwine with myth, spirituality, culture, and zoolatry.

The perspectives of Canadian Aboriginal writings are characterised by a holistic approach to life, blending storytelling with songs, dance, and homocentric thinking. Notable writers who prefer the term "First Nation" include Thomas King, Lee Maracle, Drew Hayden, Maria Campbell, Tantoo Cardinal, Tomson Highway, and Basil H Johnston. They view literature as having three functions: to guide, instruct, and provide insight; to express values, beliefs, theories, and sentiments; and to give accounts of tribal institutions, rituals, and ceremonies while preserving the essence of tribal ideas. Gregory Younging comments on Canadian literature in *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing by and about Indigenous People* as follows:

> The creation and expression of culture by Indigenous people – through any traditional medium, or any contemporary medium, or any combination of these – constitutes what can be referred to as the 'Indigenous Voice.' The contemporary Indigenous voice is a unique mode of cultural expression that draws from a blend of traditional and contemporary sources such as oral tradition; techniques of traditional storytelling; film; inanimate, animal, and spirit characters from traditional Stories; Indigenous historical perspectives; and contemporary Indigenous existence. (11)

The concluding part of the introductory chapter of *The Routledge Concise History of Canada* affirms:

> Canada's First Peoples survived the impact of colonialism and are in the process of recovering and rebuilding artistic and social forms; orature, as a vehicle for cultural and belief system, is an important today as written literature. The narratives of conquest and settlement, as well as political modes of being, form an important part of the colonial era; these narratives have since been critiqued and have at times been replaced by alternative stories concerning colonialism. (Lane, Richard J 20)

Magic spells and chants convey "land secrets" in Canadian aboriginal writings which refer to the knowledge, stories, and spiritual connections of indigenous peoples to their ancestral land. The themes of resistance and lamentation for a vanished society form the heart of these oral narratives.

Any discussion of indigenous literature cannot be complete without considering the literary works produced by the Aboriginals in Australia. Australian Aboriginal literature predominantly features “dream time” as a literary story component. Rooted in folklore, this means all aboriginals share the same belief system based on “stories of dreaming” owned by groups and nations rather than individuals. Storytellers share tales about ancestors, history, the dual spiritual world, the natural environment, values, and the rules of living. They also bear responsibility for social, moral, and ethical matters, and their stories contain repositories of geographical and environmental knowledge. Subsequent violence and assimilation have further ripped the storytelling and cultural practices as well as memories. This is why their writings aim to combat the marginalisation of their culture, language, tradition, colour, region, and religion. Some types of Aboriginal protest literature focus on cultural aspects and self-discovery, while others emphasise nature and romanticism. In his work, *A Companion to Australian Aboriginal Literature*, Wheeler writes:

> While numerous themes resonate throughout Australian aboriginal literature, the most dominant in the stolen generation, the loss of identity that was the consequence of legislation enacted by Australians federal and state government has haunted numerous Australian aboriginals, and many have chosen writing as a vehicle to overcome past injustices and start the healing process. Aboriginals had been recording and sharing their life, histories within their culture for countless years, but, until they were recognized as citizens there were few public forums in which they could speak out against

> their forced removal and correct the many history books that failed to accurately document what really happened. (6)

David Unaipon, Sally Morgan, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Anita Heiss, Kim Scott, Alexis Wright, Kevin Gilbert, Mudrooroo, Bruce Pascoe, Jack Davis, Tara June Winch, and Marcia Langton are some of the aboriginal writers who write about indigenous culture, the past and present, expressing aggression and resistance in their descriptions of what they see, smell, and feel. The declaration of 1993 as the "Year of Indigenous People" was a milestone in the Fourth World movement's efforts to gain recognition and rights.

A history of racial inequality, colonial language appropriation, and neo-colonial power has collectively shaped the indigenous literature in New Zealand. In *From Silence to Voice: The Rise of Maori Literature*, Paola Della Valle explains Indigenous Literature in New Zealand as follows:

> Writing back to a centre located in their own land, challenging mainstream literature and expressing a different point of view on reality. Maori writing in English is necessarily a hybrid literature, which moulds the genres of the Western canon and the language of the colonisers into new forms reflecting the influence of the Maori oral tradition, the pace and rhythm of the Maori language and a different sensibility. It is also a vehicle to pose the political stances of a marginalised group, an act of resistance to hegemonic discourse, and a defence of cultural identity that cannot be interpreted in essentialist or nativist terms. (93)

The interrogation of the homogenising and universalising discourses on race, belonging, and identity forms the primary objective of the writings of Witi Ihimaera, Patricia Grace, Alan Duff, and Hone TuWhare. Valle noted, "They opposed any monocentric view on reality and showed the potential of alternative values. They rewrote history, challenging the dominant version, and counter-colonised the genres of the Western canon and the English language" (95-6). These authors have significantly impacted the literary world and beyond by challenging the status quo. Their contributions are a testament to the importance of recognising and celebrating diverse cultures on a global level. In the preface of *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Daniel Heath Justice described the situation as follows:

> Our literatures are just one more vital way that we have countered those forces of erasure and given shape to our own ways of being in the world. Our mindful stories, in all other forms and functions – and whether vocalized, embodied, or inscribed – honour the sacrifices of those who came before us and who made it possible for us to continue the struggle today as specific peoples in relation with the world. They help us bridge the gap of human imagination between one another, between the other human communities, and between us and other- than- human beings. Fundamentally, they affirm Indigenous presence and our present. (Justice)

Therefore, a critical analysis of the notable characteristics of indigenous literature must take into consideration their historical oppression and their need to assert their culture, focusing on the problem of identity crisis in order to consequently progress to the larger issue of human rights in general. Indian tribal

studies form a vibrant part of subaltern studies, which helped to first bring academic attention to marginalised voices. The study and discussion of subaltern life came to the limelight with the publication of *Subaltern Studies 1*, edited by Ranajit Guha in 1982. Prominent historians such as Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, Gyan Pandey, and Shahid Amin were dissatisfied with the traditional nationalist historiography of India. In the chapter "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, Ranajit Guha states that the existing nationalist historiography was "no lofty idealism addressed to the general good of the nation but simply the expectation of rewards in the form of a share in the wealth, power, prestige created by and associated with colonial rule" (3). He went on to note:

> What clearly is left out of this un-historical historiography is the politics of the people. For parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes and the groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country – that is, the people. This was an autonomous domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter. (4)

Critics like Guha felt that the conventional approach neglected the history of the marginalised and the oppressed groups in India. Quite contrary to this approach, these new historians sought to correct the nationalist picture by examining the history of the subaltern or the marginalised groups in India. Ranajit Guha, a historian who had previously worked on the history of the peasant revolt in colonial

India, formulated a radically new method of writing history. The key figures of this group include Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. This group of historians was influenced by the works of Antonio Gramsci, who wrote about the concept of the subaltern in the context of Italian history. Subaltern studies profoundly impacted the study of Indian history, challenged the dominant nationalist historiography, and opened a new avenue for studying the subaltern. This study emphasised the agency of the subaltern and how such a figure resisted oppression and domination. They also highlighted the importance of language, culture, and identity in constructing the subaltern subject.

The establishment of subaltern studies as an academic discipline that challenged the existing elite historiography brought the excluded masses who performed the majority of the work associated with India's popularity into focus. This paradigm shift gave impetus to Dalit writers who were already voicing their marginalisation through their words, in order to define the nature and purpose of their writings. One direct result of this change was the formation of Dalit Studies in the 1990s, the foundational principles of which were laid by the publication of *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies, and Considerations* in 2004. In the introductory chapter, "Dalit Studies: New Perspectives on Indian History and Society", historian Ramnarayan Rawat, the co-editor of the collection, described Dalit studies as follows:

> The field of Dalit studies seeks the inclusion of the study of Dalits in the Indian context and in the global diasporic context within broader trends of knowledge production and pedagogy. Second, it offers a framework to

> compare Dalits with related social groups in other national contexts, including African American struggles, with which Dalits have forged long-standing connections; the Burakumin protests in Japan; and the anti-apartheid protests in South Africa. Third, with the upsurge of Dalit political and cultural movements in the 1990s and the renewed national and international debate on caste, efforts like this project have emerged as sites of new scholarship being produced by both Dalits and other like-minded scholars that reframe the analysis of society from the structural position. (19-20)

In comparison with the academic field of Dalit studies which emerged only as recently as the 1990s, the genealogy of tribal studies can be traced back much earlier to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In fact, the earliest attempts to study tribal lives were started in the colonial period. In *Tribal studies - Emerging Frontiers of Knowledge,* Tamo Mibang says:

> There is shift in the perspective of tribal studies in recent years. During colonial period the study of tribes carried self-image of the researcher into it. S/he studied tribes as 'other's culture'. During that time ideological base of thinking was built up on the notion of 'racial superiority', 'white man's burden to civilize the savage', etc. The mentality and attitude were reflected both in words and actions; tribes were labelled as 'primitive', 'savage', 'barbarous', etc and converted to 'Christianity', what the 'civilized' people thought of as means and ends of the civilization . . . Colonial mentality of 'superiority' was not directed to build up the relations with tribes alone; it was a great divide

between Western culture and other's culture which included oriental and tribal cultures in general. (2)

Later, tribal studies were taken over by Indian researchers and ethnographers including Sarat Chandra Roy in the pre-Independence era. However, the tribals remained merely an object of study, as the concept of viewing them through the lens of the “others’ culture” had formed the methodological core of tribal studies in the earlier period: “It is a known fact that the concept of 'other's culture' was very much core to tribal studies” (12). It is with the emergence of writers from within the tribal communities themselves that a holistic understanding of tribal studies gained entrance into the limelight. The dismantling of the aforementioned “other’s culture” inevitably occurred in the tribal writings, as the tribals’ own perspective regarding identity and self were finally able to come to the foreground. Thus, despite the common motive of challenging the mainstream from their respective marginalised positions, it can be seen that while subaltern studies aim to deconstruct colonial historiography and Dalit studies question caste and caste identity, the methodology of tribal studies is grounded upon tribal identity and ethnography.

Tribals or the indigenous groups of India, have a rich and complex history that spans thousands of years, as Adivasis are believed to be descendants of the pre-Aryan inhabitants of India. In “Tribal India: A Dimension of Indian Civilization”, the second chapter from the book *The Tribal Culture of India*, L P Vidyarthi and Binay Kumar Rai write that "[t]he tribal India lives in the forest hills and naturally isolated regions known as a rule by different names meaning either the people of forest and hill or the original inhabitants and so on” (25). According to this study,

the history of tribals can be traced all the way back to "the days of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*; for in them there are references to tribal communities who are referred to as Jana." The authors go on to argue:

> When, in his exile, Rama reached the borders of the forests of Central India, the land was introduced to him as the abode of the tribal people, *jana-sthana*. Even in the Vedic literature, there are references to people who were different in physical appearance, and who worshipped strange gods; and other words, the contact between the tribes and to the farming and cattle rearing people who crowded in the more open plains has been a continuous one over the centuries. (26)

The tribal experience of marginalisation forms an essential aspect of the history of India. The long and complex history of the Adivasis is often overlooked in mainstream Indian history, as the people at the bottom of the society are denied the right to record and preserve their versions of history. Tribals have faced marginalisation and oppression for centuries, beginning with the arrival of the Aryans in India millennia ago. Tribals did not feature anywhere in the traditional social stratification in early Hindu society known as the Varna System. Colonial rulers later introduced a "land settlement policy" that affected "tribal ownership" (35) of land, effectively forcing them off their ancestral lands. The invasion of colonial cultures further suppressed their native cultures and traditions. In the post-independence era, the developmental projects such as dams and mines for economic growth aggravated the dispossession of Adivasi rights. These radical changes

associated with discrimination and violence from governmental policies and the actions of non-tribal communities have only accelerated their alienation.

The historical experiences of tribal struggle against colonialism and ongoing efforts to reclaim their land, culture, and identity are remarkable. Both Adivasi aggressions and writings contribute to the ways in which they historicise their experiences, such as the impact of state policies on Adivasi communities, as well as the challenges they face in the contemporary era. Although tribals constitute around eight percent of India's population and are spread across various regions of the country (Ministry of Tribal Affairs), their history has been largely neglected in mainstream Indian discourses. With the onset of the 21st century, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of tribal history and culture. Several governmental initiatives and academic as well as media interventions have contributed a great deal in this regard. The All-India Adivasi Cultural Committee, Bodo Sahitya Akademi, and Santali Sahitya Akademi are pioneers in the flourishing genre of Adivasi literature. Tribal groups such as Santali and Paniya broadcast news and cultural programmes. Some universities in Andra, Gujarat, and Assam offer courses in the study of Adivasi languages. JNU, the University of Hyderabad, Andra Pradesh University, and the Central University of Jharkhand also offer courses related to Adivasi culture. Furthermore, the government inaugurated the Indira Gandhi National Tribal University in 2008, which is an acknowledgement of Adivasi identity. The individual and collective identities of tribals had been drastically altered when the government took over tribal land for mining, agriculture, and other purposes. Different types of policies for development

introduced new land laws that undermined Adivasis' traditional land tenure system. Tribal communities in India were not passive victims of colonialism; instead, they have resisted the British rule through various means, including armed struggle, protests, and the formation of social and agricultural movements. In fact, the "Santhal Rebellion" of 1855-56 (35), led by the Adivasi brothers Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu, was one of India's most significant battles against British colonial rule.

It is important to focus on the traditional social structures, cultural practices, resistance movements, and contemporary challenges in order to explore the rich cultures and complex history of tribal communities in India. Kingship and village-based networks were traditional systems that organised tribal communities. They have also developed complex resource management systems to make better use of land such as forests to make life easier. These practices were significantly based on a deep understanding of the environment, with the hope of preventing environmental changes; as a result, such activities ensured an interconnectedness among humans, Nature, and spirits.

G N Devy devised his own notion of "tribe" in his edited work *Painted Words: An Anthology of Tribal literature*: "Since it is impossible to characterise tribals by any distinguishing feature, it can be tempting to argue that in the present day, tribals are simply the most underprivileged or underdeveloped groups in the country" (9). However, colonialism, industrialisation, and modernisation have eroded these traditional systems to a considerable degree. Adivasi communities make use of rich cultural traditions, including music, dance, art, and oral history.

These cultural practices reflect their unique relationship with the environment and understanding of the world.

Tribal and Dalit literature emerge from the ideological structures of subaltern discourses. In the chapter titled “No Name is yours until you speak it: Notes Towards a Contrapuntal Reading of Dalit Literature” in *Dalit Literatures in India*, the situation is described as follows:

> The predominantly Marxists Subaltern Studies Collective founded by Indian historians in the 1980s, has likewise been criticized for ignoring the modes of expression and belonging of the outcastes by privileging class over caste. The group was nonetheless motivated by a quest for non-elitist knowledge. It aimed at restoring subalterns as subjects and agents of their own history, at recovering their specific sphere of experience and at reconstructing lost voices and non-metropolitan narratives. It therefore seemed to correspond to the Dalit ‘agenda', and to the avowed aims of many Dalits activist and writers (Zecchini).

Therefore, subaltern studies focus on the history and experience of marginalised groups, with a particularly large emphasis on peasants. Whereas Dalit literature and writers “challenge an ideology based on differentialism, and on the many-sided exclusion, this differentialism involved on the spatial, social, cultural and discursive levels. The hierarchical caste system traditionally implied a strict partitioning of space and physical segregation” (Zecchini). In the formative years, tribal literature was often considered to be just a smaller part of Dalit literature. This is because early tribal writers, such as Laxman Mane and Laxman Gaikwad, were

believed to be the followers of Dalit ideologies. This view has been called into question in recent years, however, as Adivasi voices have emerged from all parts of India, arguing that they have a unique existence, identity, and literature. They have put forward the notion that mainstream *savarna* literature and aesthetics must make room for tribal literature as a distinct genre.

Tribal writings reject the dominant mainstream literature, which often disregards the beliefs and customs of the tribal. Instead, they focus on myths, rituals, and beliefs that are central to their identity. G. N Devy, in *Painted Words: An Anthology of Tribal Literature*, documents that "They accept a worldview in which nature, man and God are intimately linked and believe in the human ability to spell and interpret truth. They live more by intuition than reason, consider the space around them more sacred than secular, and their sense of time is personal rather than objective" (10). In Indian literature and society, tribals were often intruded upon and constructed to satisfy Brahminic scholarship, as documented in the chapter "Unpaid Teachers" from the work *Post-Hindu India: A Discourse in Dalit-Bahujan, Socio-Spiritual and Scientific Revolution*:

> Brahmanic scholarship has relegated them to one monolithic category and has classed their mode of being as 'vanavasi'. Why did 'Hindu' textual knowledge structures classify them using nomenclature they did not wish to be associated with? Why was tribal culture self-constructed in the image of Brahmanic culture? The tribal communities have been classified into groups such as Vanavasi and Adivasi in a typical high-caste Hindu mode of negativism". (Ilaiah)

Tribal literature offers a challenge to such kinds of conventional beliefs and documents that serve to reinforce the homogenised tribal image. It is a powerful tool against racism, oppression, objectification, and stereotyping. Reclaiming one's presence and voice in society is a global phenomenon, one which is realized especially well through celebrating one's identity and culture. Indigenous writers from India use rustic language to narrate untold stories to become a part of India's diverse literary tradition. However, these writers face a significant struggle to find their space in the academic world, a struggle that is precipitated largely by prejudice and discrimination. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a new literary canon that addresses the vulnerable lives of all marginalised communities in India. This will ensure that these communities receive equitable representation in the academic world and that their voices and experiences will be heard and appreciated by a wider audience. G. N. Devy contends in *Painted Words: An Anthology of Tribal literature*, "What might be new is the present attempt to see imaginative expression in tribal languages not as 'folklore' but as literature, and to hear tribal speech not as a dialect but as a language" (15). Jaipal Singh, one of the most influential leaders of the tribal community, greatly influenced many people. His speeches and letters played a significant role in framing an Adivasi identity instead of a generalised tribal identity. He used the word "Adivasi" instead of the tribe to express the idea that they are Indigenous. However, writings from tribal authors emerged or began to be read or discussed widely only later. Tribal writings today challenge misrepresentations of their identity, present counter-narratives, incorporate the writings produced by the internally displaced tribal communities, and advocate for representation in society. Their articulation becomes a powerful demonstration of the past, silent but more

poignant than the representations in other subaltern literatures. Most of their writings delve into issues of intersectionality, cultural genocide, *savarna* ideologies, power structures in society, dispossession of land, and lost tribal history.

Understanding ancient tribal culture and its resistance to exploitation, defeat, and displacement requires insight into the alternative history presented in tribal literature. By bringing forth alternative accounts, tribal intellectuals challenge the communal, religious, and political notions imposed upon them. Tribal literature reflects the love and humanity of the tribal people and their association with Nature. Their literature is often passed down orally through stories, performances, drawings, and rituals. Today, tribal literature has attained a new dimension, with the coming of written narratives by tribal writers, which function as counter narratives to those provided in mainstream literature. The proliferation of different genres of literature penned by tribal writers creates fresh, unexpected avenues with which to engage in the socio-economic and political spaces of the tribals in India. Contributing to the tribal literature, writers such as Gladson Dungdung speak on human rights issues, Adivasi rights, displacement, and the politics of indigenous people based on his displaced childhood experience in *Whose Country Is It Anyway?: Untold Stories of the Indigenous Peoples of India* (2013), and *Mission Saranda: A War for Natural Resources in India* (2015).

Dayamani Barla, an activist, journalist, and writer from Jharkhand, has been actively participating in the struggles of Adivasis in Jharkhand for a long time. Alice Ekka, renowned as India's first female tribal storyteller, has disclosed a new canon in the literary world through her stories, in *Alice Ekka Ki Kahaniyan*, edited by

Vandna Tete was published posthumously in 2015. Anuj Lugun's work, *The Tiger and the Daughter of Sugna Munda* delve into themes of love, freedom, revolution, and religious and gender discrimination. Ramdayal Munda, the founder of the All-Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU), continued his efforts for cultural mobilisation until the end of his life. Haldhar Nag, a Sambalpur poet popularly known as "Lok Kabi Ratna," emphasises the importance of poetry as having real-life connections and messages for the people, covering everyday life, social issues, Nature, religion, and subaltern oppression through notable poems such as *Lokgeet*, *Samparda*, *Krushnaguru*, *Mahasati Urmila*, *Tara Mandodari*, *Achhia*, *Bacchhar*, *Siri Somalai*, *Veer Surendra Sai*, *Karamsani*, *Rasia Kavi* (biography of Thulasidas), and *Prem Paechan*.

Susila Samad, also known as Susila Samanta, is a highly regarded Hindi poet, journalist, and editor who has made notable contributions to tribal culture in two poetry collections: *Prallap* (1935) and *Sapne Ka Sansar* (1948). Jecinta Kerketta is passionate about showcasing Adivasi philosophy from a tribal perspective, which has not yet been comprehensively explained despite the existence of several books and writings on tribal history. Her notable works include *Angor* (2016), *Land of The Roots* (2024), *Ishwar Aur Bazar, Jacinta Ki Diary* (2022), *Prem Me Ped Hona*, and *Jirhul* (2024). Laxman Mane, the writer chosen for this study, is one who challenged the mainstream writers with his honest and incisive words.

Tribal writings have emerged from all over India. People from Northeastern states received colonial education far better than the tribals from other states because most of the northeastern states use English as their mother tongue. For that reason, a

brief account of the tribal writers from the Northeast will inevitably make up an important part of any discussion about tribal literature. Such thinkers address not only their tradition and culture but also contemporary tribal issues. In the second chapter of the book *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing by and About Indigenous Peoples*, titled "A History of The Portrayal of Indigenous Peoples in Literature", Younging provides the following commentary:

> In creating the Indigenous Voice, Indigenous authors are using a unique form of artistic license, which is Nation-based – that is, Indigenous Nation-based. It could be termed "Indigenous National Artistic License". This gives indigenous authors permission to innovate traditional knowledge, and it characterizes part of the relationship between the Indigenous artist and the Indigenous Nation to which they belong. The concept of Indigenous National Artistic Licence connects to the continuity, adaptability, and evolutionary nature of Indigenous ways of being in the world. (16)

Younging's observation hinges on the innovative nature of tribal literature that continues to renew and update its own themes and methods of writing and representation. In the fourth chapter of the same text, he went on to note:

> Cultural rights are part of contemporary Indigenous cultural reality. Understanding these rights including how they evolved, is key to working in a culturally appropriate at the respectful way. Indigenous peoples think of Creation as something that includes and sustains all living things. People are part of it and responsible for caring for it. The question of 'who owns it' has

> no context. By contrast 'who owns it' preoccupies European notions of the world. (25)

Owing to its stress on collectivity, tribal literature calls attention to not only individuals but all living things and is, for that reason, inherently more inclusive. The study of tribal writings from India will never be complete without mentioning writings from the Northeastern states of India, because the thinkers from that area tend to write about their cultural rights, tribal land, representation, and inequality. Ramanika Gupta has listed many writers from Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim and West Bengal in her edited work *Indigenous Writers of India – Introduction and Contributions Volume 1: Northeast India.* In the chapter titled "Adivasi Writing and Emerging Consciousness" in *Tribal Contemporary Issues: Appraisal and Intervention*, Ramanika Gupta and Anup Beniwal have provided a detailed overview of the contemporary Adivasi writers and their articulations. According to them, there are many writers who offer detailed descriptions of their Adivasi consciousness:

> Critics like Dr. Rajender Thakare, Rose kerketta, Ramis Kandulna, and Doman Sahu '*Sameer*' have undertaken the evaluation of Adivasi literatures. Lataari Kabru Madaavi, who is engaged in the reappraisal of Ravana, is trying to 'set right' the deliberate distortion in the representation of tribal life. Dr Govind Gare in Marathi and Chetanya Prasad Majhi in Orriya, by focusing on the issues of Adivasi dislocation, development and change, and Rajender Singh Munda and Ram Dayal Munda by analysing in Hindi the political and religious context of the tribals, are trying to create a blueprint

> for Adivasi studies. Dayamani, Vasavi, Bitiya Murmu, Nirmala Putul and Rose Kerketta, in trying to pen Adivasi questions, are trying to problematise them from different angles. (26–7)

In the Introduction titled "Canon Formation and Literatures from India's Northeast: Some Reflections" in *Literature from Northeast India Beyond the Centre Periphery Debate*, edited by K M Baharul Islam, one finds the following assessment:

> The very title of Temsula Ao's collection, These Hill's Called Home: Stories from A War zone (2006) indicates how the fabric of social life was torn asunder in Nagaland. She shows how women suffered the most, caught between the Naga insurgents and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) promulgated by the government of India in 1958 that gave the army unbridled power without accountability. (Asaduddin)

The Bhil poet Waharu Sonawane articulates the self-identity of the tribal in the poem "Stage" as follows:

> We didn't go up to the stage
> no one asked us, actually
> only by pointing fingers
> they showed us our place
> and we sat there.
> 'Great', they exclaimed.
> And they went up on the stage
> started narrating us our own sorrows

but, ‘our sorrows remained ours
never became theirs…’
in confusion we whispered.
They tried to listen and sighed
And then plucking our ears hard
blasted
‘Say sorry, otherwise . . . ’ (Stage)

In the poem “Give Me Back My Name”, Chandrakanta Murasingh argues that the gradual loss of identity could be characterized as follows:

When I try to look at my own face -I got confused.
. . . they have changed my name-
. . . I know, one who has lost the name loses the dignity too.
Today I saw tears in the eyes of Twisha Ranchak
They have changed her name too.
Why this change of names?
My people never ask the question.(Islam)

Mamang Dai's poem, “No Dreams” recounts the losses in tribal life in a similar manner:

The days are nothing.
Plant and foliage grow silently,
at night a star falls down,
a leopard leaves its footprints.

The wind blows into my eyes
sometimes it stirs my heart

to see the land so plain and beautiful.

If I sit very still
I think I can join the big mountains
in their speechless ardour.

Where no sun is visible
the hills are washed with light.
The river sings
love floats!
love floats!
But I have no dreams. (“No Dreams")

These are far from the only writers worthy of mention in this regard, for there are also numerous tribal writers who speak of their experiences in different genres of literature, such as in the songs and poems which are rich in images of nature and tribal life. Their short stories and novels often articulate their survival and resistance.

Akin to the Dalit autobiographies, tribal autobiographies provide the first-hand testimonials of rural and urban tribal lives. Mamang Dai’s *The Black Hill*, *Escaping the Land*, and *The Legends of the Pensam*, Jahnavi Barua’s *Rebirth*, Mitra Phukan’s *The Collector’s Wife*, and Aruni Kashyap’s *The House with a Thousand Stories* are only a few examples of tribal writings deeply engrained in the respective states. Temsula Ao, a poet, short story writer, and ethnographer from Assam, draws inspiration from the oral tradition of her community. She shares insights into each tribe's distinctive colour schemes and designs, highlighting the ways in which the

Nagas have preserved their identities despite globalisation in her works, including *Songs that Tell* (1988), *Songs that Try to Say* (1992), *Songs of Many Moods* (1995), *Songs from Here and There* (2003), *Songs From The Other Life* (2007), *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007* (2013), and *Songs along the Way Home* (2019).

Along with Narayan, renowned writers and activists from the Kerala tribal tradition include Sukumaran Chaligadha, C K Janu, and Asokan Marayur. Historians have depicted the Adivasi life as a mere medium to fulfil others' needs, as is evident from the pre-colonial archives and historical writings on tribals, displaying stereotypical features which can still be seen in museums today. Several oral narratives of the tribals provide alternatives to the falsely written records of their lives. Most of the records available about the tribals have been written by non-tribals and are likely to be biased according to their perceptions, as well as the writers' academic or research needs. There are no documents that strictly reveal the balanced life enjoyed by the tribal in pre-colonial times. In today's world, tribal intellectuals argue that they are themselves the living documents who can represent these neglected societies. In the chapter "Othered in One's Own Land: Adivasi Writing in Kerala" in *Contemporary Adivasi Writings In India: Shifting Paradigm*, the situation is described as follows:

> The social reform movements of the 19th century let by eminent leaders like Ayyankali, Sahodaran Ayyappan, K P Karuppan, and Sree Narayana Guru also worked in favour of Dalits and backward castes in Kerala. The Adivasi narrative on the other hand is not just different, it varies from region to region. For instance, as early in the 19th century geographical and social

> economic factors like proximity to important trade routes, encroachment by people from the plains, as well as incursion by Christian missionaries into the hills of Central and Southern Kerala, negatively impacted the traditional way of life, livelihood and cultural heritage of the tribes of these regions and led to the erosion of defining features of their identity – insularity, distinct culture, traditional knowledge systems, culture-specific rituals and language. (Thankamma)

The lives of tribal people underwent a significant change as their land, economy, and culture came to be reorganised. However, the importance of their artillery skills and economic management have largely been overlooked by those tasked with commenting on this transition. Historians have tended to produce a convenient lie for the sake of the ruling class, claiming to bring welfare to the underprivileged people while really intending to structure the power relations in favour of the former. The state, moneylenders, and landlords (*sarkar*, *sahukar*, and *zamindar*) took on the role of the saviour.

The colonialist notion of the tribal people as primitive and backward began in the mid-19th century, as people in power carefully used this stereotype to construct the deceptive narrative that they were concerned about the welfare and development of these oppressed people by declaring that they stood for the protection of the Adivasis. This socio-political shift that emerged from the sense of "development" thus gets reflected in tribal literature. Biswamoy upholds the idea in *Adivasis in Colonial India: Survival, Resistance, and Negotiation* that tribals are an integral part of "South Asian reality" and "not just [a] colonial construct" (2). He

goes on to remind the reader, “It is of course another matter that what is often labelled as colonial construction would not have been possible without the active participation and collaboration of the upper caste, Brahmanical order, at every stage of this knowledge production” (Pati 2–3). Ramachandra Guha, Ranajith Guha, and Chatterjee reread the political representation of Adivasis in the colonial period in order that the unnoticed subaltern might obtain a proper representation in the writings of these historians.

One major challenge encountered by tribal writers is the lack of uniformity among the various tribal languages and dialects. Because those in the mainstream society does not understand their language, tribal writings are incapable of reaching larger audiences without translation. Because most tribal writers come from remote areas and rural backgrounds, they tend to not have a formal education, which further hinders their visibility in the publication industry. The prevalence of the othering gaze, prejudice, stereotyping, and bias limit the possibility of genuinely rereading tribal writings and also contribute to the cultural marginalisation of the tribal peoples. Additionally, tribal peoples continue to be negatively affected by social and economic exploitation, such as forest acts, land acquisition for development projects, and the displacement of tribal peoples from their native land.

In opposition to these negative forces, tribal literature has had a significant influence on the rights and welfare of indigenous people through its instrumental role in promoting awareness of their repercussions in the face of development, land acquisition, and exploration. Through their literature, tribal writers constantly attempt to preserve their languages, traditions, and cultural practices, which are

often under threat from mainstream society and globalization. As a result, they have expanded the scope of Indian literature by incorporating diverse opinions and perceptions, offering alternative perspectives on issues of identity, nationhood, and social justice.

For these reasons, the future of tribal writings seems quite promising. The increasing awareness of tribal rights and the emergence of new tribal writers, particularly within digital platforms, help make tribal literature more accessible to contemporary audiences. Efforts to translate tribal literature into major Indian languages and international languages will provide a further boost to tribal communities' ability to express themselves to a larger audience. International literary forums facilitate bringing global attention to their issues and contributions by providing additional platforms for tribal writers. Tribal writings are enriched with vivid cultural symbols and practices which allow them to articulate social issues dealing with human rights, injustice, and problems of representation. It is essential to continue supporting and enhancing the voices of tribal writers, ensuring that their stories, struggles, and cultural wisdom are not to be lost in the face of modern challenges.

The emergence of tribal literature is an offshoot of the realisation and validation of the tribal self and identity, which in turn have been spurred on by certain movements and uprisings. Tribal movements have rarely been defining events in history, often replaced by trend lines marking changes in the lives of Adivasis, despite their significant impact on colonial rulers. History books often focus on the crowded spaces of dominant groups. Still, India's literary field has

improved significantly in recent years, allowing for greater recognition of the contributions and struggles of less widely recognised communities. The Midnapur Adivasi revolt (1918-24) responded to landlords' continuous control over Adivasis and their land, resulting in disappointment among the members of the community. Similarly, the Devi movement from South Gujarat (1922-23) aimed to transform the tribal status into a part of the Hindu religion through Sanskritisation. Xaxa comments in *State, Society, and Tribes Issues in Post Colonial India*:

> In such movements, the question of identity is brought to the forefront. The issue of identity, which had been dormant in earlier tribal movements, has added a new dimension to tribal movements. Identity issues have been articulated in both cultural and political terms. Indeed, political issues have been instrumental in the rise of autonomy movements among different tribal groups in India. (53–4)

Tribal movements have been influential in shaping the Adivasi political consciousness and safeguarding them from threats. However, progress has been made difficult due to the isolation of each group from the others – similar to the isolation of certain African ethnic groups – as well as the absence of identifiable leaders like Ambedkar to unify the many diverse and heterogeneous tribes into a single movement. Nonetheless, the tribes have used sensitive protest signals initiated by leaders such as Jaipal Singh Munda to defend themselves against new industries, education policies, and other changes that might threaten their way of life. The emergence of political and cultural identities among tribals has been driven by the local, scattered resistance of subaltern groups that challenge the notion of a unitary

domain of politics. Political actions were not uncommon among the tribes in Kerala. Xaxa observed the following:

> Land- and forest-based movements historically have been more widespread in eastern, central, and western India. In southern India, such movements have been a recent phenomenon. The land and forest movement waged by the Adivasi Gotra Samaj in Kerala under the leadership of Janu has received wide attention. (54)

The fine balance between such developmental policies and geographic isolation intensified the process of dispossession, which led to the undesirable side effect of cultural erosion. However, many Adivasi sabhas originated in various pockets of India, especially in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and the Northeastern States and these sabhas cumulatively joined together to reclaim the socio-cultural past.

In the post-colonial period, in the states of West Bengal, Bihar and Andra Pradesh, Maoist insurgency amounting to a rebel uprising became popular among unidentified Adivasis, largely as a result of their frustration with the bureaucracy's and political parties' continued failure to address their basic needs. Such Adivasi insurgencies restructure the notion of a nation and its people, as well as the power of place and space to deconstruct misrepresented identity and selfhood. Adivasi Sabhas addressed displacement, resettlement, and the absence of human rights and gave Adivasis a voice. For those who consider themselves vulnerable minorities, joining such movements and participating in such political assertions can seem to bring some light to life, given that the demand for basic human rights and equality are the

fundamental problems of concern to minorities. Adivasis have organised many political campaigns to solve these problems. Although the Indian government adopted many plans for Adivasi welfare, they are often not the beneficiaries of these implementations. Additionally, the construction of many dams and industries in Adivasi areas led to the uprooting of land for development, cultural submergence, unbalanced development, and an influx of outsiders, leading Adivasis to be alienated from skilled jobs. In the article "To be governed or to be Self-govern", the tribal rights activist, Dr. Smitu Kothari argues the following:

> Indian government retained the same laws and continued the erstwhile colonial attitudes and policies over Adivasi communities. They continued to be victimized, their cultures and lifestyles disrespected, and their resources base exploited, with hardly any benefit accruing to them. In actual practice, such state policy was aimed at assimilating them into the "mainstream" on terms that they had very little say in. In effect, while they participated in elections, the promise of democracy and justice was largely denied to them. (Kothari)

The seismic waves of tribal movements emerged in accord with one's desire to fight for the rights which one's first-hand experience of inequality had led one to feel deprived of; these movements, in turn, extend into many different areas of concern, such as economic deprivation, separatist tendencies, ethnic identity and political representation, poverty, hunger, unemployment, and exploitation. Tribals in Kerala fought for their rights mainly by conducting strikes against the injustice of land dispossession. The gaps in tribal policies, encroachment of outsiders, alienation from the forest, denial of livelihood, and ghettoisation played a significant role in

making them aware of their rights. In analysing the tribal movements in Indian history and their representation in literature, it becomes evident that works such as *Urati*, *Thekku, Nella* (T C Jone), *Ponni* (Malayattoor), *Chaveru*, *Agneyam*, *Nellu* (P Valsala), *Sickle Life* (Jose Pazhukkaran), and *Maveli Manram* (K J Baby) are a few narratives which do not accurately depict the tribes as they truly are. Adivasi literature and ideologies tackle this issue of identity crisis and social differentiation caused by imposed identities and dominant ideologies. In the introductory page of *Being Adivasi: Existence, Entitlements, Exclusion*, Abhay Flavian Xaxa, a prominent tribal activist and sociologist, articulates what they are in his poem "I am not your data":

> I am not your data, nor I am I your vote bank,
> I am not your project or any exotic museum object,
> I am not the soul waiting to be harvested
> nor am I the lab where you are theories are tested,
> I am not your cannon fodder or the invisible worker,
> or your entertainment at India habitat centre,
> I am not your field, your crowd, your history,
> your help, your guilt, medallion of your victory. (Xaxa)

However, it is essential that tribal literature become prominent not only as a literary genre but as a social order to reconstruct tribals' identity and challenge the enforced stereotypes. In comparison with tribal narratives from non-tribal writers, Adivasi literature encompasses the bitter realities of the past and present. In *Indigenous Literature and Comparability,* Durmin identifies that "Indigenous

literary critics and scholars (who are often writers as well) are concerned that white critical standards and theories do violence to Indigenous texts and constitute a continuation of colonial domination" (4). Because Indigenous literature has a unique character, translating its rustic words into mainstream language can be very challenging. Direct and honest, these writings present the tribals' ethnic reality in a straightforward manner. Similarly, such work plays a significant role in allowing one to encounter the nuanced objectification by restructuring the misrepresentations without using indirect statements or convoluted arguments. Highlighting the style, and authenticity in experience, Adivasi writings uphold an intense plea for equality and justice for humans and the environment. Thus, they show that the nature-culture dichotomy does not exist in tribal societies, because the tribal people find oneness and solidarity with Nature instead of a binary opposition between human and non-human factors.

Representation and writing are political acts that have the potential to help one enter a given power structure. In *Of Many Heroes: An Anthology of Tribal Literature*, G N Devy described the situation as follows:

> Literary History is basically an apparatus of canon formation [and] reflects the values of the society in which the historian lives, or for which he writes . . . A history of literature without these values and judgements implicit in them is impossible as a state without power-structure. Justification of the authority wielding power is in fact the main purpose of canons (5).

In that sense, the text is shaped by the matter-of-factness of experience instead of imagination and emotional expression.

There have been many ongoing debates and discussions surrounding the representation of tribal culture in non-tribal literature. Tribal literature is deeply connected to Nature and life, while the literature produced by non-tribal writers reflects their representation of tribals as outsiders. Literature is a political act defined by social space and hegemony. Therefore, non-tribal literature portrays the intricate ways of tribal life, often influenced by the writer's politics. The tribal figure reconstructed in non-tribal literature is shaped, transformed, and defined by the writer's understanding and level of knowledge, leading to paradigms and hierarchies of meaning. On the other hand, tribal writers write from an insider's perspective, through campaigning and for Nature and humanity, in addition to focusing on expressing their belief regarding topics like the following: sexuality, language politics, indigenous rights, orality in written form, forgotten history, nationality, shifting identities in the modern world, and biocentrism.

In Narayan's article *"Kocharethi Calls upon Us to Ethically Engage with It,"* the author noted that "[t]he misrepresentations were marginalising a marginalised community. I wondered what I could write about, so I decided to stick to what I knew best. So I chose to describe my life, upbringing and culture" (Narayan). The shared sense of identity and belonging among individuals and groups is shaped by the meanings which they attribute to their experiences. These meanings are context-bound and can vary depending on the situation. These meanings can shift so significantly because although language is the medium through which meanings are conveyed, extra-linguistic factors such as power

dynamics, subjectivities, and identities can also play a major role in influencing them.

Unfortunately, non-Adivasi literature often portrays Adivasis in a politicised manner that satisfies the colonial perspectives of the past. In such contexts, tribals are depicted as nameless, traditionally linked to nature, illiterate, superstitious, and controlled by irrationality. Animal imagery is often used to highlight Adivasi life, and their cultural identity is typically absent in such writings. Most works of non-Adivasi literature do not give proper acknowledgement to the specificity or distinctiveness of the tribal sect. Additionally, such literature often exhibits a patronising gaze and authorial distinction. This results in the creation of a homogenised Adivasi identity that ignores their diversity and richness of culture and experience. Non-Adivasi writers tend to stereotype Adivasi identity based on their own biases and preconceptions, resulting in an isolated and distorted picture of the tribal people. Mane, Narayan, and Shekhar offer an authentic insiders' perspective, recognising Adivasis as the authorities in determining their own identity. This heterogenous identity presented by tribal writers subverts the erstwhile homogenous and monolithic tribal identity.

While most studies on Adivasi life have combined Dalit ideologies and perspectives, the present study intends to approach the contours of the Adivasis' space and identity through their fiction and self-narratives in India. In order to come up with a proper treatment of the nature of Adivasis' writing through examining different strands of Adivasis' life, this thesis focuses on lived space, lived experience, power, caste, and identity as interrelated in the theoretical fields of

space, subaltern, and indigenous studies. It analyses five narratives belonging to three different genres, which engage and pose issues which the dominant literature tends to consciously avoid. In these narratives, the past is evoked not simply as a bygone entity containing the richness of tribal life but as an inseparable past and present, which can channel the organic growth of tribal identity to overcome the changing terrains of geopolitical discrimination. The study devotes a substantial portion, in the form of an extended introduction, to the careful examination of the social context of these texts. The critical concepts pertaining to the study of the cultural space and ethnic identity have not been previously applied in the context of Indian tribal literature. Keeping in view the corelated notions such as lived space, power, caste and identity, the study of indigenous literature spanning the colonial and post-colonial periods gives a methodological structure to the thesis. Writers such as Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar use English, the global language for reaching out to an international reading community.

Tribal identity develops from cultural practices and culture space with respect to various changing perspectives, replacing and breaking the canon. In Stuart Hall's work *Representations; Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, he provides the following commentary on this topic:

> 'Culture' is one of the most difficult concepts in the human and social sciences, and there are many different ways of defining it. In more traditional definitions of the term, culture is said to embody the 'best' that has been thought and said in a society. It is the sum of the great ideas as represented in the classic works of literature, painting, music and philosophy. (2)

Anti Randviir agrees with Hall in *Space and Place as Substrate of Culture* but supplements his thesis with the argument that culture gets shaped by the choices of society and history, which in turn determine the lifestyle of its members. Theoretical inferences about culture come from imprints of cultural traits on the environment, which are unique to the social sphere, whether those imprints be material or immaterial. Culture reflects what society can observe in the physical environment (149). Further, he adds that culture expands its identification space by conquering new areas, requiring the rearrangement of behavioural patterns. Norms and guidelines for creative, interactive, and semiotic behaviour are embedded in geographic space as cultural traces (153). In analysing the arguments of Hall and Randviir, one concludes that culture embodies the best aspects of a person's life; because culture dictates a person's lifestyle, it inevitably expands in relation to space. For this reason, he argues, "Space also serves as a substrate for culture through descriptive techniques. It has become a common habit to talk about cultures in terms of cultural spaces, about cultural units forming semantic fields and spaces" (141). These, in turn, maintain the connection among culture, space, and place.

The concept of space is a highly debated topic in literature, with scholars often dividing it into two different kinds of parts: physical space and abstract space. Because different cultures define their physical and conceptual spaces in unique ways, the study of tribal literature, nation, and land cannot be separated from these two concepts. On one hand, the physical space of a community is shaped by its territory, and this has a significant impact on a given people's cultural identity. For example, Adivasi culture is closely tied to lived and metaphysical spaces, focusing

on communal values over individualism. On the other hand, space is also connected to human emotion and behaviour, as a person's surroundings help shape their identity and relationship with society.

A marginalised person's life is closely tied to his or her living spaces, as he or she shapes his or her history and embarks on a quest for social visibility. When these spaces are threatened, they have to compromise their freedom and self-respect. Tribal communities have been fighting against the acquisition of their living spaces by conquerors who seek to establish their dominion and power. The invisible forces of globalisation are restructuring the world, putting human life at risk. It is essential to turn to Cultural Studies, particularly its concepts of cultural space and ethnic identity, to understand those who are often marginalised by society. In *History of Sexuality*, Michael Foucault introduced a new dimension to space, emphasising that it is created by society, discipline, and biopower (135-40). Under this view, tribal narratives allow one to examine the space occupied by Adivasis in the Indian socio-political context and how disciplines and biopower have created chaos in marginalised communities. While any region can be seen as a site operated on by power, the way in which the dominant often seek to limit the subaltern space in slums is revealed to be particularly significant. Henry Lefebvre's "lived space" is a symbolic space linked to production, knowledge, signs, codes, and symbolisms. It includes unique locations for each social group, guaranteeing competence and performance. Representational spaces embody complex symbolisms tied to the underground side of social life and art (33). Lefebvre puts forth the concept of "lived space" by elucidating the following argument:

> It is the experience they articulate in lived space where new forms and experiences develop visible changes into a discursive practice. Spaces are produced. The 'raw' material from which they are produced is nature. They are products of an activity which involves the economic and technical realms but which extends well beyond them, for these are also political products and strategic spaces. (85)

Lefebvre continues this line of thought by arguing that a product is not just a commodity but also a means of production shaped by exchange networks, raw materials, energy, technology, knowledge, the social division of labour, and society's superstructures (85). From this perspective, it can be understood that tribal spaces are produced not only as the co-existence of the tribals with Nature, but also as the superimposition of several external forces, such as the encroachment of mainstream knowledge, ideology, and power hierarchy.

Gopal Guru supplemented Lefebvre's argument by directly connecting the theory to the problem of social space:

> Dalits are not about sharing their lifestyles, living with them, and being like them, but being them in the sense that you cannot be anything else. Or in other words, to be a Dalit is not to share all that they have but to share what they cannot have. Lived experience is not about freedom of experience but the lack of freedom in an experience. (36)

One can theorize about another person's experience because there is a space within that experience that is not related to the experiencer (39). He emphasizes that

"[l]ived experience suggests an immediacy that is not present in the other idea of experience, which is already refined through reflection, conceptual structures, and so on" (55). For that reason, "[t]he production of experience hinges on the reproduction of spaces. Spaces that are structured along different axes – economics, colonial, discursive – tend to produce fragmentary forms of experience" (72). On one hand, Dalit space is formed from the lived experiences of Dalits based on caste status, which results in their being excluded from public spaces and having very limited access to public resources. On the other hand, tribal space evolves out of the tribal status marked by external encroachment into their land and exploitation of resources. In other words, if power operates within the mainstream public sphere or "the centre" effecting the elimination of Dalits, the same force also acts in an opposite direction towards the tribal space or "the margins" leading to their subjugation. It is important to recognise that in the context of the lives of the marginalized, space goes beyond mere physical location because it also carries personal, social and political meanings. For marginalised communities, space often involves the resistance and negotiation of power structures. Areas inhabited by lower-caste or oppressed groups can serve as sites of defiance against dominant societal forces.

Concepts like heterotopias (alternative spaces) and panopticism (surveillance) are valuable for understanding the lived experiences of subalterns, who frequently endure spatial practices that confine and discipline them. Foucault's notion of "heterotopia" in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology* is a spatial concept that refers to real places designed in society, realised utopias that contest and reverse

all other places. Foucault describes these as mythical and natural spaces that exist in the space in which we live (179). In this context, space is influenced by historical and contemporary power dynamics, such as colonisation and caste hierarchies. Subaltern communities often experience "spatial domination" through segregation in ghettos or slums and surveillance by authorities (179). These environments not only control but also discipline the behaviours of those who live in them. Guru illustrates how caste affects one's interactions with space, given that caste entails restrictions over the areas where individuals are allowed to live, as well as regulations over which people they can interact with; Guru's emphasis on these factors led him to highlight how such interactions with space inevitably lead to social exclusion. The study of lived space, as discussed by Lefebvre and Guru, emphasises the everyday experiences of subalterns, who face exclusion and marginalisation. The political nature of their lived experiences is shaped by the ways in which power structures come to be manifested in spatial contexts, influencing where people can live and interact. By connecting the ideas of these concepts one can see that space is not a neutral backdrop; it is a contested site shaped by power relations. The experiences of subaltern groups are intricately linked to the spatial practices and structures upon them imposed by society.

Transitioning from the theories of Lefebvre to those of Edward Soja, one finds that the first space, or perceived space, encompasses emotional and behavioural patterns and the complex spatial organisation of practices that shape the interactive space. The second space, or conceived space, refers to the knowledge of space created by power and ideology. Edward Soja proposed the concept of a Third

Space, distinct from heterotopia in *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. It is a space that promotes an open exchange of ideas and allows diverse perspectives to coexist, including those which had previously seemed to be mutually incompatible: "It is a space where issues of race, class and gender can be addressed simultaneously without privileging one over the other; where one can be Marxist and post-Marxist, materialist and idealist, structuralist and humanist, disciplined and transdisciplinary at the same time" (5).

He further explains the notion that the Third Space merges conflicting concepts like subjectivity and objectivity. The articulation of tribal identity in tribal narratives is problematised on two planes; the tribal occupies the subject and object positions at the same time. That is to say, the tribal lived space acts as the Third Space where multiple, often conflicting, identities co-exist. Specialised knowledge fragments it, destroying its openness. It is linked to Lefebvre's concept of nomadic meta-Marxism, which focuses on how space is shaped and produced by social forces, impacting the lives of human beings. It rejects confined knowledge production by revealing that approximations aid in navigating the complexities of the modern world (56-7).

Soja's interpretation of the Third Space covers a wide range of spatial characteristics, including capitalist, cultural, dominated, epistemological, fragmented, global, hierarchical, historical, ideological, institutional, lived, masculine, natural, neutral, physical, political, social, state, traditional, urban, and women's spaces (59). Applying this to the tribal context, the tribal lived space comes to be acted upon by a multitude of diverse forces that seem to oppose but also

reinforce one another. Globalisation precipitated from the capitalist ideology joins with dominant powers to impose and institutionalise cultural domination and hierarchy upon tribal lives. The socio-political intrusion and urbanisation of the indigenous space from the period of colonial history has suppressed the traditional and epistemological roots, as well as their varied and fragmented heterogenous existence, reducing the tribal to the status of a merely stereotyped homogenous whole.

Homi K. Bhabha advocates for the supplementary idea, the Third Space of enunciation, in *Location of Culture*, in order to challenge the conventional cultural knowledge revelation. This disrupts the representational mirror, making meaning fundamentally ambiguous and cultural knowledge no longer part of an expanding code. He states, “It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized and read anew” (55). In these ways, Edward Soja's and Homi Bhabha's concepts of Third Space are interlinked with Lefebvre's definition of lived space. This perspective allows one to see abstract space as a tool wielded by the authorities, raising crucial questions about the silence of the users.

Bhabha observes that conceptual space relies on non-critical knowledge, while lived space is supported by violence and a bureaucracy that capitalises on the gains of capitalism (52). The relationship between space and culture is complex and deeply intertwined with lived experiences. It is shaped by factors such as caste and

the relative positions of castes in the Varna system, the resultant power structure in society, along with experiences, all of which remarkably affect identity and space in society. For marginalised tribals, these factors can play an even more crucial role in determining their identity and the spaces which they occupy. Understanding the interplay among space, culture, and identity allows one to develop a deeper appreciation for the complex dynamics at work in society. From this angle, everyday experience is linked to theory, underscoring Lefebvre's understanding of "lived space" as something that is is not a neutral site but instead one of constant negotiation and potential transformation.

A given society's power structures heavily influence the formation of both cultural space and ethnic identity. This power is demonstrated, constructed, and regulated through restrictions, violations, deprivation of valued possessions, and segregation of space. The concept of the "other" is challenged and problematised by power, in that cultural areas are segregated based on socio-economic, racial, ethnic, political, and religious differences. The dominant class may have forced others into this segregation, or it may have been a voluntary or consensual act. The government created colonies, segregated cultural spaces, and used the ruler's power to establish a system.

In *Third Space: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Soja argues that power "is ontologically embedded in the centre-periphery relation. However, the presence/absence of power is not neatly defined or delimited" (31). Lefebvre explicitly connects power to knowledge in order to show how the former reinforces the latter's effects in *The Production of Space*. The struggle

between power and knowledge occurs in both whole and fragmented spaces. Violence, constraints, and ubiquitous power characterise dominated spaces. Practical spaces impose norms and rules, repressing them in the name of power. Social spaces are normative and repressive, instrumentally linked to efficacy that surpasses ideologies and representations (358).

He reiterates the importance of grasping how such spatial practices marginalise disenfranchised people through noting, “Lived space bears the stamp of the conflict between an inevitable” and “maturation process and a failure to mature that leaves particular original resources and reserves untouched. It is in this space that the 'private' realm asserts itself” (362). Similarly, he affirms, “The whole of (social) space proceeds from the body” despite its transformation to the extent that it may be forgotten or separated to death (405). The forceful actions of the dominant communities in the name of modernity drastically altered the physical and cultural geography of Indigenous communities, fundamentally reshaping their sense of self and their robust connection to the lived space which made up their reality. Modernity and its power dynamics caused the displacement of tribal possessions, pushing them to the margins while regulating their migration.

The intrusion of outsiders led to the division of territory and evoked a consciousness among tribes of the need to take action to preserve their space. They initially stood united in the name of group, region, and language to reclaim the lost power in their areas. Each community had an institutional order, which was used to awaken tribal consciousness without, however, being used for discursive construction. Moreover, such space was described as something which “contrasts

with resistance[, such that o]pposition is crucial for power relations to exist" (167). Power relations only come into play when individuals cannot act as they wish. Opposition takes precedence and forces power relations to shift (*The Essential Works of Michel Foucault* 167*)*.

Foucault sees resistance as a creative process, rather than a merely negative phenomenon, which was therefore capable of providing a way to actively change undesirable situations. The outcome of these ideas is significant because power dynamics are largely enacted through symbols and purposeful actions that allow for the exertion of power (*Power* 338). He further elaborates the correlation between power and physical area as follows, "A power relationship requires recognising and maintaining the subject who acts, and the possibility of responses. Space is fundamental in communal life and exercise of power (340). In addition, he opined that, "Space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power" (361).

Spivak explains Foucault's concept of power as intentionality without a subject in *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayathri Chakravorty Spivak*. In this context, she reiterates his views on resistance and the importance of communal power structures. In the sixth chapter of the text, Spivak tries to merge power with sexuality but says sexual difference is often disregarded in power deployment (Spivak). Quoting Partha Chatterjee in the eighth chapter, she adds, "The taxonomy of modes of power can be made to interact with the history of sexuality. Chatterjee quotes Victor Turner: "Resistance or revolt often takes on the form of . . . communitas" (Spivak). These spaces acted upon by power carry the dominant

ideology, creating new norms, values, and meanings in the process, which later become the rule presiding over a given space. Such exercise of power by hegemonists has a profound effect on human life. As Homi Bhabha explains in *Location of Culture*, "Hegemony requires iteration and alterity to be effective, to be productive of politicized populations: the (non-homogeneous) symbolic social bloc needs to represent itself in a solidary collective will – a modern image of the future- if those populations are to produce a progressive government" (24).

Incorporating various viewpoints, he questions whether the concept of dominance can be directly represented without invoking its conflicting and uncertain nature. How can a group's collective desire solidify and come together as a means of giving representation to a population? (30) By drawing on the frameworks provided by Foucault, Spivak, and Bhabha, one observes that the spatial and physical dimensions of power — both historically and in today's society — shape the sexualities and identities within tribal communities. As these spaces take on the character which they have as a result of external influences, the methods of resistance, representation, and invisible, unnoticed cultural preservation also tend to adapt accordingly. In tribal context, under the pressure of various disruptions in life, the desire for resistance often manifests itself as a reclamation of physical space and cultural practices. This reclamation creates a new power dynamic that allows for the representation of diverse identities, challenging imposed norms and fostering new possibilities for communal self-definition.

Adivasis were not subject to the same kind of segregation as Dalits endured, as they were not part of the Jati or Varna consciousness. Rather than exist in a

vacuum, caste is deeply ingrained in Hinduism and serves to maintain and preserve the social order founded up on the former. However, individuals at the bottom of the caste ladder, such as subalterns have faced oppression from time immemorial. Adivasis, for their part, have unique ways, practices, and traditions, but they have historically not been considered part of the caste pyramid and have not received adequate political representation as a result. The spatial terrain of tribals and Dalits in India is shaped by cultural hegemony and caste division. Commenting on Ambedkar, Arundhati Roy in *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition* presents a critique of his experiences of caste as "In such an arrangement where most of the power is vested with the guardians and the remaining with the auxiliaries (the 'twice-born' Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas in the caste context), there is no mechanism to ensure that they will not oppress the producers (Shudras and Untouchables)" (263-4).

According to Ambedkar, caste is a custom unrelated to religion because it hinders spiritual and national growth. Likewise, Varna and Ashrama are separate from castes. They instruct individuals to earn their livelihood through hereditary occupation, by defining responsibilities rather than rights (286). Biases related to caste are reflected in social norms and values, which, in turn, influence the unconscious mind. Humans tend to act on their impulses based on biases. This leads to systemic discrimination and the desire to maintain power and control by excluding and polarising specific individuals or groups. Power, caste, and marginality are intricately linked, yet any discussion of one of these terms must necessarily involve understanding the others. Recognising how these concepts

intersect and impact individuals and societies is essential. Those who wield power often demand and enjoy privileges, which results in a monopoly of power. In the post-Independence era, the categorisation of ethnic groups as Scheduled Tribes (ST) in the constitution of India, akin to the classification of the Dalits as Scheduled Castes (SC), has brought the former, according to the general perception of the society, to occupy the same lowest rung of the caste ladder on par with the latter.

However, tribals do not envision themselves to be part of such a caste-based identity that strips them of their unique subject positions and concerns. Thus, caste identity plays a significant role in determining who gets to holds the central and the marginal positions. Even though they do not belong to any caste or caste-based identity, tribals are considered to belong to the lowest caste, according to the public perception of the society.

Ethnic cultural groups have faced significant threats from new cultures, further exacerbating the marginalisation of tribal people. Although efforts have been made to fight for inclusion and centring, marginalised individuals must adapt to the changes and work to redesign their place in society. This process has, however, been slow to materialize throughout history and remains as yet uncompleted, an incompleteness which has resulted in the acute decline of ethnic life and the imposition of unacceptable limits on tribal culture. Marginalisation remains an important issue when it comes to discussing subaltern lives, as it is the primary cause of social exclusion from their rights and privileges. It, therefore, creates mental and physical struggles in their quest for social status and inclusion. The lack of equity and resources only compounds the problem further.

Ambedkar believed that caste has ruined Hindus, and that Hindu society must be reorganised based on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. He argued that this requires discarding the divine authority of the *shastras* and destroying the religious sanctity behind caste and varna (324-5). Spivak supplements this hypothesis through arguing that the "'Third World' as its object of study will remain constituted by those hegemonic First World intellectual practices" (59). The Hindu "colonial subject" internalised sacred geography as an allegory in colonial India. This created an immediately accessible "other" without confronting racism or exploitation. Spivak argues that First World intellectual practices shape the "Third World" as a subject of study (243). Dipankar Gupta makes another point in *Interrogating Caste: Understanding Hierarchy and Difference in Indian Society*, asserting that the history of caste reveals a closed, "feudal-like social structure" that was adopted into the Hindu society as a result of various past occurrences. Caste mobility, change, conflict, and debate have been prevalent in Indian history, factors which "normalise" Hindu culture and its ideology (8). It is no exaggeration to say that this feudal-like social structure embedded with power turned marginalised life upside down.

During earlier times, there was confusion among Indian ethnographers such as Sarat Chandra Roy about the meaning of the terms "tribe" and "caste" in India. Nevertheless, it was not until the postcolonial period that a more systematic effort was made to differentiate between tribes and castes. Despite the clear distinction between the colonial and postcolonial periods, ethnographers from different eras had varying ideas about the relationship between caste and tribe. As a result, society has

placed greater emphasis on defining castes rather than tribes. Castes are divided based on the Hindu religion, while tribes are identified more generally as those living on the fringes of mainstream society.

The concept of "race" is commonly used in sociology to group individuals based on their physical appearance and ancestry. Even though race is not as crucial as caste would be in India, it nonetheless contributes to the division of human beings based on varna. The upper castes are believed to have descended from the Aryan race while the lower castes are considered to be of Dravidian lineage. According to Alfred Cort Haddon, the tribals in India belong to neither group but are instead believed to be pre-Dravidian in origin. In his book *The Races of Man and Their Distribution* (1924), he refers to them as "out-castes" (109). In such a sense, they are called "Adivasi", or 'Adima nivasi'. Malinda Maynor Lowery discusses this issue in the preface of *Lumbee Indians in the Jim Crow South: Race, Identity, and the Making of a Nation*:

> [R]ace as a layer of [….] that springs from inherited characteristics but is primarily used to rank and divide the human population into groups. This purpose of race gives it a situational nature, like all categories of identity, and […] that race is not merely ascribed by dominant groups but also claimed for strategic purposes. Yet, its influence changes in the course of the identity conversation between insiders and outsiders, and it rarely existed as the only layer of identity. (xv)

The relationship between caste, tribe, and race is undoubtedly complex, yet in a very real sense one might say that all of these factors might contribute to

collectively shape a given person's identity. The intricacies of these categories highly influence specific groups and significantly weaker sections of society. This relation does not create privileges for them but reinforces their marginal space and creates a sense of identity crisis. These factors can affect a person's sense of self, social status, and opportunities, and they can either limit or expand their potential. Along with race, ethnicity is also a crucial factor that contributes to an individual's self and identity. The term ethnicity refers to a sense of belongingness associated with a social and cultural group that shares common regional origins and traditions.

In the chapter titled "The Politics of Naming" from the work *Race and Ethnicity: Culture, Identity and Representation* says that Identity, Stephen Spencer argues that it is especially important to conceptualize ethnic identity as usually enclosed in the notion of race. He opens the possibility of this discussion as follows:

> 'Race' and 'Ethnicity' are terms which appear confusingly unstable, hedged about with sensitivities and mirroring the shifting social and cultural contexts in which they are encountered. They are not stable definitions of some static social reality; rather, as central concepts of identity, they are constantly changing and being adapted to fluid social contexts. Ethnicity, like race, can be an imposed category or, conversely, it can become central to a revolutionary sense of identity in a struggle for independence or political power, or simply a recognition of shared experience or attributes. (47)

Both race and ethnicity are social constructs used to categorise people. In the case of the tribals, these two factors superimpose and act together, differentiating them into a marginal position. Since identity is an important factor in spatiality, M

J Schueller explains in *Locating Race: Global Sites of Post-Colonial Citizenship* that "the larger concepts at play in thinking race-oppression, resistance, othering, colour, rights-need to be constantly rethought, redefined, indeed reformulated, through different context" (43). Gopal Guru similarly notes:

> Claims of identity are often grounded in specific experiences. The specificity of experiences seems to demarcate different notions of self and community. There is nothing new in this observation, but what is perhaps more topical is the attempt to validate diverse experiences, and this, by default, involves a critique of any attempt to categorize diverse experiences into a few universal categories. (2)

Here Guru critiques the attempt at homogenising the tribal identity and underscores the need to pronounce the heterogeneity of tribal existence.

According to Homi Bhabha, agency and subaltern consciousness's "emphasis on the disjunctive present of utterance enables the historian to get away from defining subaltern conscious as binary, as having positive or negative dimensions. It allows the articulation of subaltern agency to emerge as relocation and re-inscription" (193). In this context, tribal writings by virtue of relocating and re-inscribing their identity and agency serve to proclaim tribal presence and visibility.

The notion of identity is intricately linked to an individual's ability to act purposefully and to maintain awareness of their marginalised societal position. Furthermore, in *The Spivak reader: Selected works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*,

Spivak pointed out that the shift from identity to agency raises questions regarding the nature of agency itself. Agency is a broad term that does not indicate its value. Calling everything a social construct is anti-essentialist and implies that the social is inherent (294). When people adopt different strategies to assert their control over others in different situations, the scope of the exclusion is paramount, and those situations are not accountable. Though the label “others” restricts the tribals from having certain privileges, they continue to possess their unique self-awareness, and from that basis, their social, rational, and moral identities come to be formed. As these identities integrate with society, they inevitably compete with all other sections, creating a complex interplay that ultimately contributes to the growth and development of humanity.

In the preface of *Lumbee Indians in the Jim Crow South: Race, Identity, and the Making of a Nation*, Maynor Lowery argues, “Identity is therefore a conversation between insiders and outsiders; these categories themselves are not fixed, and the labels represent heterogeneous populations. Hence, the conversation is not always polite and rarely achieves consensus” (xii). Hilary N Weaver in *Indigenous Identity: What Is It, and Who Really Has It?* Remarks, “Identity is shaped, in part, by recognition, absence of recognition, or misrecognition by others and identity can be multi-layered. Different levels of identity are likely to be presented in different contexts” (243). He further writes, “Self-perception is a key component of identity” (243). Connecting identity with culture, Weaver comments, "Cultural identity is not static; rather, it progresses through developmental stages during which an individual has a changing sense of who he or she is, perhaps

leading to a rediscovered sense of being Native" (244). Identity constantly evolves as one interacts with others, exchanges culture, and reflects on oneself. It is formed through the interplay between the elements of sameness and otherness and the constant effort to create a space for both. Identity is shaped by various factors such as cultural activities, national and regional events, religious practices, as well as the reactions to different situations. Over time, the differences in identity change in response to the evolving cultural norms. Maintaining space for individual expression is essential, but this is increasingly being threatened by organisations that seek to restrict freedom. Individual expressions must be accorded space, despite external threats from elite domains to restrict the liberty of the tribals.

According to Weaver, "Native identity has often been defined from a non-native perspective. This raises critical questions about authenticity: Who decides who an Indigenous person, Natives, or non-natives?" (246) Xaxa comments in *State, Society, and Tribes Issues in Post Colonial India*, "The declaration of 1993 as the International Year of the World's Indigenous People has sharpened this identity, for this identity has now come to carry certain rights and privileges with it" (38). He adds that citizenship provides individuals with full membership in the community and an array of rights and obligations. This stands in contrast with the conventional notion of status, typically associated with hierarchy and inequality. In India, people identify themselves as belonging to a specific region, despite there being differences in language, physical features, culture, and social organisation. Xaxa further states that "Citizenship entitles an individual to full membership of a community. It confers an array of rights and obligations upon them. In this sense, the status of an

individual as a citizen is contrary to the general notion of status, which is invariably associated with the notion of hierarchy and inequality" (41).

The complexity of tribal identity arises from tribals' unique knowledge and lived experiences within the community, along with the complex interplay of factors leading to the rise of a given social construction within a specific cultural context. Those who held such unique insights were excluded from society, and their complex life experiences were deeply reflected in their community. If these differences are ignored or denied, they can lead to mental conflict and even cultural erosion.

In *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities: Beyond Domination*, Avril Bell highlights the pressure on indigenous people to abandon their unique identity and assimilate into mainstream society, while facing discrimination based on their appearance (71). Individuals of mixed descent assert their indigenous identity to resist and affirm their heritage. Cultural identities are crucial for indigenous and settler communities to establish their sense of being and belonging (195). James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin argue in *Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity* that social categories are formed by labels and two main features: membership rules and content. Descent rules and cultural attributes define ethnic identities. The authors propose "Social Construction by Discourse" and "Individuals as Agents of Construction" to explain how social categories are constructed. They are not merely given; rather, "Ethnic identities are understood to be defined mainly by descent rules of group membership and content typically composed of cultural attributes, such as religion, language, customs, and shared historical myths"(4). Race, identity, agency, and subaltern consciousness intertwine in the experiences of

marginalised groups. The intersection of these concepts sheds light on the realities faced by tribal groups as they deal with the complexities of oppression and strive for justice. Within society, the Adivasi people have tenaciously pursued social justice and recognition for their cultural identity.

In conclusion, cultural space encompasses a complex blend of culture, identity, and experience. It is a domain in which tribal identity interacts with power dynamics, caste systems, and cultural hegemony through lived experiences, often resulting in marginalization. Consequently, these experiences compel individuals to embrace hybridity as a response to modernity and to assert their resistance.

Chapter III

Dynamics of Marginalisation and Resistance in *Kocharethi* and "Thenvarikka"

The terms "marginality" and "resistance" hold great significance when it comes to defining an oppressed person's place within society. Essentially, there are two distinct spaces that "the other" can occupy: a marginal space or a space of resistance. Furthermore, there are many in-between spaces amidst the extreme ends of marginality and resistance. These spaces, in turn, produce new experiences as a part of everyday life. Any attempt at binary categorisation is therefore bound to be problematic, since the fluidity of identity and the intersectional realities that shape subaltern life cause the boundaries of each side to become intermingled or blurred. This may result in the creation of an uneven hierarchy, which cannot be solely confined to one particular space.

The inability to question, resulting from a fear of authority or submission to power, has existed for a very long time in tribal life. As the tribals occupied the marginal space, their voices and struggles were largely ignored. However, the ground reporting with regard to tribal lives unravels their existence and resistance, such that tribal writings play a unique role in allowing one to question the crucial moments in life, especially with regard to their ability to assert their identity and reclaim their space in society by changing the marginal space which they occupy to one of resistance. This chapter provides a study of how the Mala Araya community represents the combined exercise of marginality and resistance, based on Narayan's *Kocharethi* and "Thenvarikka".

Kerala, situated in southern India, has always been a melting pot of cultural and social diversity. However, despite significant advancements in education and other measures of societal development, marginalisation due to casteism continues to persist in Kerala. Nevertheless, social workers and activists have intervened promptly to solve this social crisis to a certain extent. Since the Kerala Renaissance, historical figures like Sree Narayana Guru, Chattambi Swamikal, and Ayyankali have all contributed immensely to uplifting the marginalised sections of society. Initially, the parallel reflections of this modernity had not yet reached tribal areas, though it is worth noting that Dalit activists and tribal movements played a crucial role in developing the tribal identity. Tribal activism and strikes were carried out with the help of Dalit intellectuals in Kerala. Even though numerous tribal movements are still ongoing in Kerala, most are in their early stages compared to those in North India. The lack of unity among the people, non-availability of financial resources, and the educated tribes' lack of interest in participating in organisations and activism are some of the factors that hamper the growth of such movements in Kerala. In the article "Adivasis Betrayed: Adivasi Land Rights in Kerala" C R Bijoy argued that scheduled areas are "the only constitutional option available for ensuring that the legislations serve the interests of Adivasis and that they are implemented for ensuring the very survival of Adivasis as communities in the future. This, of course, has to be politically forced" (1336). Political representation is one means to ensure their rights and make them accessible to the mainstream. In other words, tribal movements address the major issues of the tribal, rediscover a zest for life, and reframe their identity.

The nuances of modernisation accelerated the process of relocating people from the midland to the hilly areas, a move which significantly affected the indigenous populations living in remote areas. The tribal communities have been under constant pressure because of marginalisation and invasion on Adivasi land, not only from industrialists but also from migrants, planters, merchants, and farmers. Given that there is no available data indicating that tribals were part of the Renaissance Wave that swept through Kerala, it seems that their presence or resistance went unnoticed. Because the prominent social reformers of that time tended to be more concerned about the prevailing disparity within mainstream society, the isolated world of the tribals fell into oblivion. In this context, the Land Reforms Act and Forest Products Act implemented in Kerala offered a new trajectory for Adivasi life. The Land Reforms Act in 1963, which aimed at redistributing land to the landless, resulted in the dispossession of Adivasi communities from their ancestral lands. This historical, social, and political dispossession and displacement were instrumental in making them vulnerable to exploitation and poverty. Similarly, the Forest Products Act in 2006 has adversely affected the Adivasi through limiting their ability to legally collect and sell forest products. Gradually, in effect, the Adivasis have lost their traditional livelihood, which in turn further augmented the difficulty of their struggle. As a result, the Adivasi community in Kerala has been fighting for their rights and entitlements, including their right to land, and demanding that their voices be heard.

In *B R Ambedkar on Social Exclusion and Inclusion Policies*, Sukhadeo Thorat and Narender Kumar utilized Ambedkar's theories about social exclusion

and inclusion policies to propose the following two strategies to facilitate the representation of the subaltern:

> [The first strategy establishes an] egalitarian economic structure [to address] structural inequalities, which will ensure equal access to income-earning capital assets and economic opportunities for the poor in general and the discriminated persons in particular. This includes creating an economic structure which will ensure equal access to land capital employment and the provision of education and health services (51).

Ramakrishnan adds another point, arguing that "dissenting voices restore the communicative trust to those who are excluded from the dialogue. Their experiences, thus, find a way back into the mainstream of voices in that society. Hence, 'dissent' is integral to the project of locating and recovering lived experience" (49). The egalitarian economic structure and the voice of dissent reconnect the bridge between the outsiders and tribal communities and create a space where they come together meaningfully for the purpose of reclaiming the rights of tribal communities.

Embracing Christianity was a defining moment that marked Mala Araya's first step towards social integration, with Christianity replacing "Mala Daivangal." The new converts believed that this would grant them political status and help them surpass other tribes in socio-economic and educational aspects. Foreign missionaries like Rev. C. Y. Thomas and Rev. Henry Baker Junior played a pivotal role in assisting the tribes in Travancore. In 1849, many Mala Arayas from Erumapra,

Melukavu, Walakom, and Mundakkayam converted to Christianity in order to escape from the clutches of caste, religion, and government officials.

The Adivasi concept of "home" reflects the idea of an environment where one is supposed to learn about sacrifice, share one's emotions, and cultivate a mindset for oneself and others through various cultural experiences. Tribal places have traditionally been the spaces which reflected tribal culture and produced unique meanings. A village is a living area defined by space and influenced by prejudice and discrimination, in which loyalty to one's home holds cultural significance for regionalism. The memories and interactions which the tribals experience within the confines of their homes serve as a critical foundation for their social development. This exploration of experiences shapes people's worldview and helps them to navigate through the complexities of their social environment with greater ease.

Under this broader definition, social spaces are both real and imagined, and are for that very reason capable of encompassing all aspects of individual identity. Interacting with others creates new meanings and reflects one's ideas, beliefs, and attitudes towards space. The purpose of a space is connected to the goal of those who work in it, as it produces new meanings through shifting from the old to the new on the basis of societal expectations.

Travel and migration often create different cultural spaces, which can be formed from the complex interplay of diverse factors including religion, food, and social networks such as schools and hospitals. Those in power may seek to exert their control over these spaces and initially limit or restrict others, not only for the sake of pursuing material or economic gains but also to maintain their needs later.

Kocharethi, Narayan's literary masterpiece, articulates the intricacies of the life of the Mala Araya community in the Western Ghats of Kerala. The novel portrays the challenges faced by the tribal population, such as Araya's experience of marginalization and exploitation by outsiders and the journey to become an empowered community. Narayan sketches out the way in which they resisted and countered these obstacles. The Araya tribe, who lived in the Western Ghats region, valued honesty and helping others but were ultimately exploited by those who sought to dominate them.

The Mala Araya tribe, also known as Malai Araya (a name which means the "Monarchs of the Hills"), inhabit the districts of Kottayam, Idukki, and Pathanamthitta. They are also known as Kanikarar, Maleyarasar, or Hill Arrians. Though they had a strong cultural and ethnic identity, they had to suffer many disruptions to their way of living, caused by outsiders' various forms of meddling, which passed under the euphemism of "development". In *Native Life in Travancore*, Samuel Mateer described the situation as follows:

> The elephant and tiger were their only foes; but with snares and traps they could hold their own against these enemies. But they could not resist the onward march of a superior race. The planter approaches them in a peaceable way, offering wages for their hire, but demanding as his right the land he has purchased. The proud men of the woods decline to herd with coolies, and work like common people. As soon as the planters axe is heard, the hill kings pack their traps and desert their homes to establish themselves in another valley. In this way they have been driven from hill to hill and from valley to

valley, until some have found now a safe resting place in the dense jungles of the lowlands of Travancore. (66)

Marginalisation happens as a result of some imbalance in the socio-cultural relations that define a given society. Put briefly, those with greater economic privileges gain the power to control others as a result of the unfair advantage which was granted them by the structural and institutional inequalities inherent in their society. Geography, ethnicity, history, and displacement fuel this experience of inequality for those who find themselves sidelined. Noted for its cultivation of spices, the Western Ghats becomes just such a geopolitical terrain, with its evolution into a space of marginality and resistance.

In "Striving for Sustainability: Environmental Stress and Democratic Initiatives in Kerala", Srikumar Chattopadhyay and Richard Franke argue that the "'Grow More Food' campaign was a program in which the government issued exclusive cultivation rights to migrate from other areas coming to the forest areas of Idukki district" (153). They go on to note, "While migration to the hill region started during the latter part of the 19th century with the introduction of plantation crops, the major inflow was during 1921-31 and 1951-61. The economic depression of the 1930s contributed to out migration from Travancore" (168). In order to escape from hunger and poverty, Christian communities migrated to various pockets of Kerala, with many choosing to settle in the remote areas of Malabar, Northern Kerala, and Idukki.

Mala Araya tribes gathered natural resources from the forests and had permanent villages on mountain slopes or in remote ravines. Whenever there was a

good harvest, many climbed to the hill to claim to be the stakeholders of Araya's effort. Christians and Muslims encroached on Adivasi areas to settle their life in secure places during the advent of modernity. In the article "Politics of Deforestation: Case Study of Cardamom Hills of Kerala", Marcus Moench says that "The Syrian Christians were less mission-oriented, but wherever they settled they soon built churches, schools and hospitals to meet their needs" (49). The Adivasi communities welcomed these newcomers for their unique offerings, such as modernity and skill in trade, but tribals soon realised that their illiteracy left them vulnerable to exploitation. However, the region underwent significant changes through the influx of migrants, such as Christians and Muslims who identified it as an area of immense economic potential.

These individuals acquired land ownership by first renting out land from farmers. Kochuraman, the central character in the novel, though his efforts were only partially successful, raised his voice to object to the merchants, as the region faced intermittent heavy rain and drought. Conditions eventually became so dire that his community needed external assistance to combat starvation and poverty. This shift impacted not only their income but also changed their lives in ways that could not be quantified in economic terms. In the introductory part of the novel, *Kocharethi*, the translator says, "In the highly stratified society where caste is a critical determinant, ownership of land is an important index of social authority" (Catherine Thankkamma xvi). The novel depicts the Araya's journey to remove those stigmatized scars from their lives. Some members of the Araya community turned to

Christianity, with the hope that doing so might improve their condition and thereby help them better adapt to the influx of modernity.

Upon arriving in the Western Ghats, the newcomers posed a significant threat to the Mala Araya community, who had long been inhabitants of the region. The influx of outsiders threatened the peaceful life they had grown used to. The Christian and Muslim settlers realised that in order to control the Mala Araya, they had to eradicate the entire Mala Araya ethnic group, who were believed to have migrated to the hills to escape the kings of the plains. Initially, the newcomers settled in the valley of the Western Ghats and established themselves as merchants to build connections with the Araya community. From merchants, they later became the authority of the culture of an ethnic group. However, their encroachment on the Araya's settlement led to friction and tensions. This situation forced those in a marginalised position to question the existing power structures. These settlers in the valley employed the same tactics that had previously caused them to be uprooted in their native region, the midland of Kerala.

In the book *Native Life in Travancore*, Mateer provided the following description of such labourers as "[T]hey will not often work for hire and are very adverse to carry loads. All their produce is carried in baskets, which are slung on the shoulders. Though sometimes spoken of as an inferior race by the Hindus, yet we generally find them looked upon as beings in alliance with some powerful demonolatry" (73-4). Being self-sufficient, the Mala Araya faced new experiences after the arrival of outsiders in their land, which resulted in their marginalisation from the dominant intruders. This was maintained and reinforced through the

structures of power, politics, discourse, and hegemonic culture. Merchants quickly adopted the notion of binary thinking in the Western Ghats, in which the Mala Araya community had established a settled life by clearing forests for cultivation.

The Mala Araya community found their place in history through such representations. However, as time passed, they were deemed inconsequential by some and were eventually forgotten by the mainstream. They unfortunately met with difficulties in the form of human adversaries and the various forms of external control which came to be implemented; as a result, the outsiders did not recognise their unique identity and contributions or appreciate their presence. The warm weather conditions, fertile soil, and the future market of the spices attracted the migrants to the Western Ghats. The fertile soil and unique climate of the region provided ideal growing conditions for various species, such as cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, and black pepper. The high demand for these spices for culinary and medical uses made the Western Ghats a hub of trade and commerce for centuries. This economic motive increased the flux of migrants, as the trade of spices brought immense prosperity to the region which got reflected in the cultural landscape. As a rule, whenever the demand for spices increases, land becomes crucial for those who seek wealth and power.

In the essay "Marginality as a Site of Resistance" in the book *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*, bell hooks says, "[U]nderstanding marginality as a position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, and colonised people" (342). The influx of people from mid-Kerala and missionaries into the region has profoundly impacted the Mala Araya community,

who can be thought of as the earliest settlers of that land. These changes have manifested themselves in various ways, from adopting new customs and practices to introducing new technologies and ideas. The Mala Araya community adapted to the shifting cultural landscape while maintaining their unique identity and traditions, weathering all these changes a result.

The varying spatio-temporal dimensions of community history are built upon material reality as a cardinal critical strategy of the novel's narrative. Narayan's novel *Kocharethi*, which narrates the Araya life from multiple perspectives, looks at the life of Kochuraman, who was born in the Western Ghats of Kerala. The novel discusses the nuances of cultural hegemony in the layered spaces of a tribal community due to the influx of outsiders into their world and the Araya community's gaze towards the hegemonic world. For decades, mainstream literature has explored Adivasi life, especially in the case of literature written by mainstream, non-tribal writers. However, these non-tribal writings tended to not show sufficient concern for exploring the tribals' identity on their own terms or to consider the unique ways in which they resisted the power structure of the dominant communities from the perspective of the tribal community.

The Mala Araya community is deeply connected to their native land. As a result, the cultural practices and values of the community are expressed and celebrated within this same space. However, they faced the need to maintain a delicate balance between the limitations imposed by the environment and the flexibility required to adapt to changing circumstances. Thus, the Mala Araya identity has always been shaped by the ongoing tension between their traditional

values and the value of global modernity. Narayan's *Kocharethi* emphasises the Mala Araya's exceptional qualities in this regard, particularly their extensive knowledge of weather patterns and medicinal plants. The text also delves into the problems of marginalisation and resistance within the Mala Araya community. A defining characteristic of Adivasi literature is its focus on the community rather than individual experiences. While the novel sketches the life of Kochuraman and his wife Kunjipennu, it is primarily centred on the Mala Araya's fight against displacement in the colonial and post-colonial periods.

Kochuraman is described as a "young man with smooth, shining skin and face, curly hair, and a tune on his lips" (6). Narayan presents Kochuraman as a man who finds liberation and joy in his own space, but the arrival of migrants and colonialism threatens his community. He explored his living space, seeking the consent of his forefathers and nature before expanding it. He cultivated and harvested medicinal plants and other products by clearing forests. Despite being an orphan, he quickly gained popularity among his people as a Vaidya. When Kochuraman wanted to marry Kunjipennu, his ancestry became a concern. Nevertheless, his successful career as a Vaidya affirmed his identity and place among the Araya. The marriage between Kochuraman and Kunjipennu altered the traditional concept of giving a daughter to her cousin.

The author introduces Kochuraman as the representative of the community. He possessed the knowledge of agriculture and hut-making in addition to medicine, which helped him safeguard his crops from unfavourable weather and wildlife. Kochuraman and Kocharethi worked tirelessly to improve their lives in the cleared

forest despite being born and raised in the woods and being familiar with the struggles of farming, including animal attacks, floods, droughts, diseases, and forest fires. Initially, they were unaware of the merchants' betrayal when merchants sold them substandard goods for their own profit. This structural disadvantage rendered them helpless because they could not avoid the need to pursue necessities like areca nuts, fish, utensils, clothes, and other groceries. Kochuraman shows his reverence for the people of the valley by addressing them as "pullambrane" which indicates that the Araya had great respect to those who live in the valley, who most often were from the upper caste or religion. Despite his expertise, Kochuraman refuses to accept any reward for his treatments, believing his work to be divinely inspired. He proudly identifies himself as a farmer and a Vaidya and is regarded as a valuable community member. Kochuraman's life signifies that Mala Araya were self-sufficient people.

The exploitation of Adivasis was mainly driven by the desire for land and the growing demand for cash crops and spices, particularly in the Western Ghats. In the article "Property Rights Dynamics and Indigenous Communities in Highland Kerala, South India: An Institutional-Historical Perspective", Darley Jose Kjosavik and N. Shanmugaratnam described the situation as follows:

> [The] establishment of large plantations by the British, British policies regarding land and forests, the colonisation programmes by the Government of Kerala, large-scale peasant in-migration to the highlands, and of late, a developmental state. All these resulted in the opening up of the indigenous peoples' economy and they were integrated into the larger market economy.

> Their resource base and livelihood systems under- went drastic changes and their property rights regimes including ownership and control over resources transformed over time and space. These processes have had serious socio-economic consequent for the indigenous communities, particularly as regards property rights in land and forest resources, and consequently their livelihoods. (1184)

This region witnessed a substantial increase in the production of valuable crops; this seemingly positive economic indicator had the unfortunate side effect of further contributing to the displacement of many indigenous communities from their traditional lands, causing them to lose access to the resources upon which they depended. Arayar had a unique language, culture, and tradition, which made them distinct; however, they simply appeared as the "other" to the migrants. The outsider's concern was not with the people inhabiting the land, but only with the land itself and the economically valuable products to be generated from the land. Likewise, they felt that their desire to profit from the exploitation of the land justified their act of othering the marginalised group which had traditionally inhabited it. This rationalization allowed them to take the land away from these "othered" tribals under the pretence that the latter were less civilized, less deserving of rights, and less capable of maintaining the land.

Worse still, in addition to the problems associated with facing outsiders, recovering from forest fires presented another chronic challenge for the community. The devastating forest fire left the Arayar community with nothing, leading them to suffer from poverty and a desperate need for assistance from the residents of the

valley. Even with their awareness of the demand for their crops from merchants, diseases and financial hardship forced the Arayar people to accept unfavourable terms from migrants and merchants. Kunjadichan, Kochuraman's brother-in-law, was powerless to do anything in protest when Hassan, the merchant, said, "Part of the debt still remains, Kunjadicha. You owed me three hundred and seventy-five. The pepper comes to around three hundred and fourteen. Now you have to pay me 61 rupees. When can you repay?" (Narayan, 65). The lack of knowledge regarding the value of their products resulted in worsening their marginalisation, which defined their social status and identity as a community.

The lives of those within the Araya community, among other communities such as Christians and Muslims, provide sites of social exclusion; likewise, the poignancy of such experiences is rendered through the spaces which they occupy. Over a period of time, Mala Araya became culturally invisible and were relegated to the margins of mainstream social life. Christian and Muslim merchants sought to fix their religious and class identities, leading to a sense that something was wrong with the Araya's practices and that the Araya community must always toil in the field.

Illiteracy worsened their experience of marginalisation, as migrants took advantage of tribals' lack of knowledge in order to intentionally miscalculate buying and selling prices, increasing tribals' debt beyond any hope of repayment as a result. Knowledge in farming and medicine failed to save them from economic marginalisation. Gradual exclusion on their land augmented their plight, and the forest was the only means of sustaining their way of life and expressing the relationship between their limits and possibilities. Virginius Xaxa comments on the

changes that happened among the Adivasi in the article “Isolation, Inclusion and Exclusion: The case of Adivasis in India” in the book *Adivasi Rights and Exclusion in India* as follows:

> Due to increasing contact and the interaction with the non-tribal population because of the extension of roads and railways, growth of trade and commerce, expansion of the administrative structure, all of which attracted a non-tribal population in tribal areas, there was a course and influence of the larger Indian society leading to some degree of acculturation in the form of sanskritisation among them. Despite that, socially and culturally, they remained independent of the structure of the larger Indian society. Some among them integrated themselves socially and culturally with the structure of the larger society and thereby moved in the direction of becoming caste rather than remaining tribes. (1)

Development (in the sense of “helping tribals”) led tribals to have to accept the disadvantageous status of economic marginality, forced acculturation to society, and absorption into its embedded caste system. Their demand to attain a reasonable price for their products remains unrealised to the present time, an injustice which has critically affected their visibility in the social space. It was not only economic instability which prevented them from fulfilling their basic needs, but also their struggles with weather and animals, as farmers found that the latter resulted in minimal crop yields and the disappearance of any reliable source for immediate income. Such marginalization inevitably triggers a sense of resistance against the dominant cultures which enforce restrictions and control over a people, while

denying the tribal community's fundamental rights to be treated as equal in any given social space. However, the people who reside in the marginal space have realised their innate potential in shaping their own culture and environment.

The Mala Araya community is often considered one of the most progressive communities, owing to their willingness to adapt to modernity and interact with migrants. During the early days of Kerala modernity, migrants approached the Mala Arayas, persuading them to relinquish their land in exchange for a hundred rupees, some groceries, and a promise to pay all their debts. The merchants disguised their true intentions as an act of goodwill, but most of the tribals did not know the value of their land and ended up signing the document robbing them of their possessions with only a thumbprint. Merchants were "muthalalis" to Arayar, and in *Kocharethi*, Narayan points out how these merchants use words like the following to encourage Araya to sell land:

> What's gone is gone. Don't worry over it. It must be around two acres. Give it to me. I want to grow some tapioca there. I'll settle your loan in Hassan's shop. Here, I'm giving you one hundred rupees as well. Buy ten idangazhi of rice, some tobacco, and dried fish now itself. Just put your thumb mark on this paper (70).

Over time, competition from migrants forced Arayas to realise the precarious nature of their helplessness; likewise, their existence came to be challenged by the forces of economic instability about to crumble under the threat of competition. Moreover, migrants snatched away the money they received for their products. Instead of realising themselves as owners, Arayar always called the merchants

"Mothalali," which shows the respect and the relation between rich and poor, owner and coolie. The Adivasi community had been lured into selling their products at low prices, only to be robbed of the same money by the malicious people whom they had made the mistake of trusting.

This situation is made even worse by the fact that the police officials, who are supposed to protect the rights of all citizens, tend to ignore or downplay the complaints of the Adivasis. This is because they give more weight to the opinion of the dominant communities, who hold more power and influence. This systemic discrimination against the Adivasi community perpetuates a cycle of poverty, injustice, and inequality. The system ensures that Adivasis will not have money or a good life. If they were to wear good clothes and have a lot of money, people would likely assume that they had looted these goods from somewhere else.

The novel narrates the incident of Kunjumundan being victimized in precisely this manner: "How did you, who live in the hills, get a waist pouch full of money? You stole it didn't you, you lying dogs? The police chief will arrive soon. When his booted leg lands on your chest a few times you'll tell the truth. Sit there" (105). Some others pretended to be rogues and demanded money and pepper, because the cash crop pepper is one of the export products guaranteed to generate reliable market income. Merchants cannot avoid entry into Araya's home because it opens the unexplored space and attempts to negotiate its socio-political intricacies.

Although the Araya community faced atrocities, they chose to stay in their native place. Against all odds, they found solutions to their problems, such as attaining education, entering into political parties, and increasing the production of

cash crops to generate more income and reduce their debt. All these efforts on the part of the Araya add up to their ways of resistance.

In the essay "Marginality as a Site of Resistance" bell hooks, it was clarified that marginality does not mean that "one wishes to lose, to give up, or surrender as part of moving into the centre, but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers the possibility of radical perspectives from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives and new worlds" (341). In this way, the very condition of their marginality triggers the resistance potential of the Araya community.

In their relative position at the peripheries of the economy, the community faced significant challenges due to the unfair pricing of their products, which resulted in poverty and exclusion. Additionally, they were subject to strict regulations and control by officials who dictated and determined life at the bottom of society. However, they were forced to believe that it was their duty to serve the king and were unaware of the exact boundaries of their land. "Resin, inja, honey, arrack, meat, elephant tusks, packets of beaten rice, ebony, wild boar…the list of offerings was long. Each one placed his contribution before the head guard and bowed low before him" (87). Officials threatened to accuse them of wrongdoing if they sold their products, leaving the Araya confused about why they could not sell what they produced. They doubted whether the king consumed all the honey and other goods they presented to him. The recurrent appearance of the officers in bright uniforms seeking prosperity in the hill further added to the community's apprehension. Through the frequent visits, the bureaucracy gave the impression that

Mala Araya owed their lives to the officials' generosity. Others wondered why they could not ask for fair wages instead of waiting for gifts: "The Arayar came forward; their second mundu tied respectfully around their waists, heads bowed, both hands held out to accept the reward…a pair of mundu and four panam" (90). They were robbed of their imagination regarding the significance of land boundaries and ancestral family names.

Araya's timely intervention and decision to move to the so-called area of "knowledge" is complemented by Kochuraman. The community began cultivating cash crops like pepper and coffee, which generated more income to allow them to purchase rice and other groceries. However, the community members' lack of knowledge about counting money affected their ability to repay their debt. Simultaneously, their effort to gain representation in spite of their lower-class status and space became a part of their life to question and resist. Kochuraman, in particular, switched to new forms of cultivation, including pepper, coconut, areca nut, and banana, as a means to regain his dignity and make money from selling his products in the market. Kochuraman also intended to expand his property for more cultivation, which indicated Arayar's changing perspectives.

The arrival of merchants in the Western Ghats caused people to re-evaluate their relationship with the land. They began to see it less as a sacred space and more as an area to be exploited for profit. The influx of migrants pressed them to clear more forests and cultivate more land: "Eda Kunjayicha, Arayan, and Urali can clear any part of the forest. You don't have to pay anyone anything. You're so lucky, yet you starve" (69). In order to increase their profits, the tribals started thinking of land

as a commodity, a habit which they learned from the migrants; as a result, they adopted new crops and agricultural techniques. Migrants advised the Adivasis to diversify their production rather than rely solely on pepper crops; it was argued that doing so would help them overcome the problems of drought, poor land management, and increasing debt, all of which eventually compelled Adivasis to sell their land.

The marginalised spaces, with their eclectic traditions, serve to encapsulate community resistance in a way that clearly points out an intrinsic empowerment that baffles merchants' assumptions about the Mala Araya's space. Initially, the Arayar community was unaware of the proper methods to calculate the value of their products; as a result, they tended to chronically sell their goods at a lower price than the market should have allowed. This all changed when merchants began selling their products at a higher cost, causing the Arayar community to realise their mistake. After Christian merchants brought fish, clothes, tobacco, and betel to sell, the Arayar community had to work even harder to make the barren land fertile in order to buy those things. In contrast, the merchants used persuasive language to sell their products. Although the Arayar community knew they were being taken advantage of, they still required products and money, making it impossible for them to avoid the merchants. Members of the Christian and Muslim communities began their businesses in the Western Ghats by assuring fair prices for the Mala Araya community's agricultural products, though it was never brought into practice as promised. Narayan presents the Western Ghats as the strife-ridden land of the Araya community's and the newcomers' conflicting interests.

The landscape and mindscape of the Western Ghats are foregrounded as constitutive of the sharp binaries separating the Adivasi and the outsiders. The continuous exploitation from merchants, resistance from the Adivasis, and the suppressive acts of violence of the officials circulate at a pace that results in many deprivations of basic amenities. This exploitation led to extreme forms of marginalization. The continuous visits by forest officers and employees of Travancore served to assert their claim over the forest and the land, allowing them to state that it belonged to the king instead of the Arayar. They carried themselves with an air of superiority and expected offerings from the community. The bureaucracy tried to create the idea that the Adivasis only work for arrack and meat. The Adivasis were pressured to offer bribes to safeguard their land, which eventually escalated into a longer list of offerings. The officers and other employees of the king were very dominant and threatening towards the tribes, warning them of punishment for any act of disobedience. The officials proclaimed, "[Y]ou should not cut down many trees. Do not kill animals. You should collect the forest produce and bring them to the range office regularly. We are the ones who have been deputed by the Maharaja to safeguard the forests. We are his officers, is that clear kannikkara?" (87). They exercised complete control over the land on the hill through their announcement:

> The forest path should be broad enough for two elephants to walk abreast. You should make a boundary wall by the tenth of the month of Dhanu. Tell all those who have escaped into the hills that we have come. We have orders to capture them. We will burn their houses and beat them up. The ranger

> overlord's order is to bind them and take them to him. Do you hear kaanikkara, you're the one who teaches these fellows to cheat. Remember we'll tie them up and thrash them. It won't be fun, I warn you. (88)

Historically, government officials have exploited and coerced tribals to clear forests and build infrastructure such as roads, often under the guise of promoting development and progress for the Adivasis. These projects often came at a high cost to the tribals, who were forced to work without any compensation. This practice not only violated the fundamental human rights of the tribals but also perpetuated an exploitative system that benefitted those in power. Virginius Xaxa explains how the intervention of officials affected Adivasi life in *Isolation, Inclusion and Exclusion: The Case of Adivasis in India*. It is argued in "Adivasi Rights and Exclusion in India" that during the time of India's independence, the conditions were to be described as follows:

> [T]he tribal society was widely displaced from their land, forest, and other essential life support systems by the colonial state and the larger population. The state and its collaborators actively caused deprivation in the tribal society, while modernisation opportunities were kept outside the purview of the tribes. These were the twin issues that marked the tribal culture, and the Indian state aimed to address them after Independence (1).

The officials' intrusion into the Mala Araya's life dispossessed them from their native place. The keepers of the Sastha Temple blamed the Araya and the Urali, another tribal community in Western Ghats, for destroying the forest, even though the employees of Travancore and the forest officers were in fact responsible

for it. Because the Araya were forced to believe that they belonged to the Hindu religion, they were made to feel ready to do anything in the name of God. Landowners such as Kunjiunni commonly considered them to have fractured identities and often exploited their workforce.

Above all, the Adivasis and non-Adivasis perceived the same land very differently. The signs of imitation and assimilation in the Adivasi lifestyle are conspicuous indications of the writer's intention to problematise the undercurrent of transition in the Araya community. Further, the tribals' transition to Christianity and the cultural norms associated with it – "all wore white clothes. No one wore any ornaments. Each one held a book with a black jacket. Their prayer came to an end" (150) –reflected the absence of any so-called "ethnic identity" in terms of identity articulation and formation.

The community protested against the system of slavery adopted by the employees of the King of Travancore and realised that the possibilities of survival exist only through adapting to the norms of modernity. Interaction with outsiders heightened Kochuraman's awareness of the vast differences between their cultural practices and non-tribal traditions, given that the preservation of tribal identity was largely undermined by society. The situation worsened considerably when many Arayar considered the need to transition to Christianity as a means to avoid marginalization. However, Kochuraman remained steadfast in his refusal to convert to any religion or embrace any beliefs or systems of dogma. Instead, he created his own space in the region as a *Vaidya*, specialising in the knowledge of medicinal plants, weather conditions, and seasons, all of which enabled his entry into the realm

of the dominant world. Many members of the Araya tribe became acclimatised to the hegemony of the new culture. Kochuraman, however, was content with his lived space. During the time of modernity, tribal people encountered migration challenges, including the dangers of wild animals and adverse weather conditions. Once, people had worshipped animals and their ancestors, but the encroachment of new spatial and religious codes led many members of the Araya tribe to abandon their traditional religious beliefs in favour of the unique cultural space offered by Christianity, which provided free education and better living conditions. In his work *The Land of Charity: A Descriptive Account of Travancore and Its People, with Especial Reference to Missionary Labour*, Rev. Samuel Mateer comments about Adivasis as follows:

> These people are employed in digging the elephant pits, and helping, with a bark rope to conduct the animals into the taming cages. In the North many of them are comfortable or even wealthy in circumstances and are well-formed in persons. Large numbers in the Mundakayam district have placed themselves under Christian instruction (48).

The imposition of social and moral codes by the merchants further confined the Arayas, thereby destabilising their existence. Newcomers demanded more crops to repay their debt and the Mala Araya struggled to maintain the balance of production and income, leading them to lose ownership of forest land, which in turn forced them even deeper into debt. This transition from being the owner to debtor caused Kochuraman to turn to alcohol for solace. In *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Ramachandra Guha argues that “the violence of

the people was the polar opposite of this: chaotic, uncontrolled, excessive and almost always, illegitimate. Not reason, but the nature of Indian society explained these 'excesses'" (191). Rather than surrender to the demands of merchants, the Mala Araya seek explication to escape from the incessant interferences by outsiders in tribal life.

There was evident polarisation in the society: the Adivasis occupied a marginal position, while those at the centre, who held power and knowledge, were free to form new meanings and create the image of the marginalized "other". Because the space given to Arayar was limited, they had to search for more options to retain the freedom they had once enjoyed. Kunjerukkan, a neighbour of Kochuraman, learned many tricks that helped the tribals on their path to protect their income. Kunjerukkan's battle and victory over the dominant people show that they too had the ability to be brave and to fight back. This small incident gave them the courage to rethink their experience of exploitation, as well as the need to resist. However, they were so generous that Narayan states, "An Arayan cannot bear the cry of hunger; his heart melts" (112).

Even though Chetty had threatened to snatch their income, when he struggled with hunger, Arayar still helped him. In the King's name, the outsiders used the bottom-up approach to help the Adivasis, make roads to the Araya areas, and make them believe that the forests belonged to the government and that deforestation was essential for colonial modernity. In that context, Kochuraman could not prevent forest authorities from entering into the Araya world, given that he was unaware of how modernity renders itself as a political alternative to replace

indigenous culture. The early years of Kerala's colonial modernity were advantageous to the dominant class, in which stereotypically conditioned notions and assumptions about Adivasi identity marginalised them even more. Through their control over the raw resources in the tribal lands, the members of the dominant group were entrenched in a new position as landlords and autocrats.

The supervisory power relations of the dominant communities were so strong that they framed a stereotypical identity of tribes, which gradually resulted in total objectification. Later, it became the cultural foundation to suppress the resistance of the Adivasi communities in the Western Ghats. Modernity spawned several separate social, educational, and religious institutions through which the tribal communities had to consolidate their position as victims of the dominant communities. Similarly, the question regarding the price of their products and lives, which were in the hands of the dominant community, acquired importance in their lives and reshaped the tribal identity. This was accomplished at different levels, including redefining the relationship between the dominant and marginalised by providing new institutions and symbols such as cinema, education, and modern medicine.

The church and its dictum "praise the lord" was new to them. Many of the Araya in the Western Ghat embraced this "new" religion and its ritualistic practices. What's more, many of them became the symbol of praising the benefits of conversion and propagators. This new transition, though arising out of the desire to bridge the gap between the oppressor and oppressed, did not fulfil expectations. Instead, there developed a new form of marginal space through the identity of a "converted Christian". Aneesh K, in his article, "Literature and Social Mobilisation:

Reading Kerala Renaissance," comments that the Kerala Renaissance is unique due to its firm footing in the subaltern community. Unlike Bengal's initial reformist efforts, which were driven by the upper castes, Kerala's reform movement originated from the lower castes to overthrow the caste system (750). However, the Adivasis in Kerala did not even belong to the aforementioned "subaltern category" and inhabited a space that was beyond the reach of the Renaissance.

The others' encroachment into the roles of forest authorities, merchants, and the king's officials created a social hierarchy, which prohibited the Araya from maintaining their lived space and denied them their cultural existence. There were occasions when these hierarchical conflicts crossed the limits of spatial terrain. The question of identity and its position problematised the Adivasis in the Western Ghats and redefined their relationship with migrants; the social hierarchy heightened binary intensity. Mala Araya's resistance to authority reveals several socio-cultural and political transformations, through which the community consolidated its space and rights. The intervention of migrants and government authorities in the name of the god Ayyappa and the king promoted their claim in the Western Ghats. Expanding the Travancore administrative network in the Western Ghats opened up avenues for further exploitation. The resistance of the Adivasis and their attentiveness to increase strength to protect their habitat demanded social space and served their quest for identity.

Migrants never expected the Adivasis to form a resistance movement against them, but these acts of resistance were born out of their basic need for survival and freedom. Their new identity as agitators redefined the community from the

constructed identity of being vulnerable, illiterate, and sometimes voiceless. Such a form of resistance can be seen in Kunjerukkan's decision to teach Marmani to children: "Now the situation is different, big brother. I'll teach some of our children. We need a group that can wield the stick in self-defence" (Kocharethi 138). Kochuraman and his community could not imagine living as refugees in their native landscape. Their growing recognition of exploitation changed the Araya's perspective with regard to land, as amid Adivasi protests the terrain no longer became as accessible to the merchants as it had been before. Consequently, this transition compelled the outsiders to rethink their strategy, as the natives defied the conventional perspectives about them. The merchants climbed the forest every season, bargained, cajoled, proposed, and encouraged the Araya to sell products. The Western Ghats provide a terrain with an abundance of fertile land, in which one encounters mainly the merchants and the forest authorities who appear to serve the king. The savarna hegemonic consciousness of these people aimed to restructure their prominence on the hill by depriving the Araya and other Adivasis of their rights or subjugating them to the position of coolies. This conflict between the Adivasis and the merchants framed the Adivasi territory as a space for assimilation to modernity, as well as resistance and protests.

For the Adivasis, assimilation into modern culture and the threat of dispossession led them to develop community consciousness, which in turn played a vital role in helping them resist the migrants. On the other hand, by fusing economic and political concerns, migrants used their newly earned privileges, such as the authority over trade and land, to establish their position and space in Adivasi areas.

Another strategy used by the migrants to dominate the Adivasis was to appear as their saviour. In particular, Kandathil Krishna Pilla's intervention in releasing the Adivasis from jail and his teachings on the rights of Arayars and Uralis, another tribal community in the Western Ghats, had given him the status of being the Adivasis' so-called protector. His conversation with Kochuraman aided in his efforts to make the latter understand that they are oppressed, through explaining how their products were not priced fairly and how their illiteracy allowed others to take advantage of them. This is a strategy that ironically gave him more power over them, through making them dependent upon him as their protector.

Krishna Pilla is seen to tacitly earn respect in this manner and is even pleased with the call "thambrane." Through receiving respect and having faithful followers, the outsiders implicitly established settler domination and transactional rights over the land. The subjugation of its people is reinstated by compromising methods such as helping, showing sympathy, ensuring the price of products, and selling products at a lower price. Settler's marginalisation and the Adivasi's resistance to it raise the question of democracy and require a reconsideration of the anti-colonial encounters of the Adivasis.

Lived experiences forced Kochuraman to rethink the root of his community's exploitation and recognise the importance of acquiring new knowledge to handle modernity. Through Krishna Pilla's interventions, Kochuraman invites an *Ashan* to set up a *pallikoodam*, a milestone in the history of the Araya community, and provide literacy to the Araya children. However, Narayan critiques the act of bringing an outsider to be the voice for the Adivasis. Such an act, according to

Narayan, reestablishes the experience of subjugation. The strong presence of change in social life, through the integration of the upper caste into their midst, in the form of bringing education and being their 'uplifters," opens up the community to others, bringing informal contact between them. Though such a shift happens, the behaviour of outsiders, the question of rights, and the political and cultural consequences, still remain unresolved. According to bell hooks, marginality is "a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives" (341). In other words, the marginal spaces opened a new space to explore, rethink, and define modernity. *Ashan*'s entry to the hill and Kochuraman's decision to build a *pallikoodam* (school) and give literacy to Araya children marked a point of rupture in Arayar's consciousness. They could easily acquire the colonial modernity that made them unique in Kerala's socio-economic standards. This representation of a new identity and the freedom to demand fair prices for products was new to Arayar.

The transition from an illiterate community to a literate society gradually shifted the Araya people from being a failing, downtrodden class, to one that was able to deal with merchants and other invaders. Arayas' search for modernity and their attempts to enter social, economic, and intellectual spheres, which had been constrained by the dominant powers for ages, were reconstituted and reconsidered through literacy. Narayan delves into the educational movements in the hills, the entry of religious conversion, and the politics of the Hindu religion in the chapter "Dispelling Darkness." Kochupilla Ashan, a prominent person in the village who acquired an almost a messiah-like status through his advice on religious practices,

hygiene, and education, gave a renewed impetus to Kochuraman's dream of reaching a new horizon after naming the institution as "Saraswathi Vilasam Kalari". Through literacy, Kochuraman dreamt of a new empowered community with primacy over the land and culture. Elite figures such as Kandathil Krishna Pilla and Kochupilla proclaimed the need to produce a new civilised Adivasi identity, by which the issues of marginalisation, exploitation, and acquisition of tribal land could be reflected and debated. The Arayars received the message that they belonged to the Hindu religion through having to trace the words "Hari Sree Ganapathaye Namaha" in rice, receiving Dakshina, giving a Hindu name to the *Kalari*, and renaming Adivasi children Kalyani, Parvathi, and Narayanankutty. The institution is viewed as a holy place enclosing new knowledge, producing a Hindu Adivasi identity to take up and execute their improvised status on the hill.

Aashan's enquiry about cleanliness, prayer songs in the morning, visits to students' homes, and the narration of puranic stories enabled him to instil Hindu religious practices in the Adivasis' mind. Narayan describes hearing mythical Hindu stories as "a time for knowledge and enlightenment" (146). Kochuraman could easily connect the Arayas to the Mahabharata and Ramayana in order to accomplish his moral purpose, to enrol and maintain the Arayas in the Hindu religion. Narayan proposes that the Araya identity became one belonging to the Hindu religion while minimising the influence of Christianity and other religions.

A hidden agenda of both the Hindus and Christians in the Western Ghats was to convert Adivasis to their respective faiths. Even as early as the Kerala Renaissance, Arayar had begun the self-imposed task of modernisation; this is seen

in their establishment of a local school or "pallikkoodam" and their attempts at gaining a modern education. However, Narayan ridicules Adivasis' religious conversion, even going as far as saying, "Even if you changed your religion, the tongue remained the same" (155). Baker remembers the missionary work among the Arayas in *The Hill Arrians of Travancore, and the Progress of Christianity Among Them* as "I said it was a faith and love to God which made men happy here in heaven. They asked numerous simple but convenient questions, not in a cavilling spirit, like the brahmins and vandalists of the plains, but on the atonement, full of man, sin, misery, and future punishment" (14).

Kochuraman's daughter Parvathi, a representative of the educated Araya women, challenged the restrictions imposed on girls by the patriarchal power structures. However, her increasing willingness to question patriarchal values affected her relationship with her parents. Although Parvathi's concerns and attitudes were consistent with the egalitarian gender status, in comparison with her brother, more rigid controls were placed on her voice and freedom of movement, especially after reaching the age of puberty. She tried to convince her parents without success, until Aashan clarified to Kochuraman that girls should attend school and college, even during their menstrual cycle.

Narayan notes that education empowered the Araya community by advocating equal rights, while challenging the traditional Adivasi value system. In this transition, Parvathi struggles to makes choices, as she tries to break free from the stereotype of a quintessential tribal woman and establish herself as an empowered woman. Her determination to question the prevalent values of the

community should be interpreted not just as an act of rebellion but also as a declaration of her womanhood. In other words, literacy and capitalist values take away the Adivasis from ethic values and norms.

The author also seeks to understand why Adivasi students are not interested in studying and, as a result, remain unwilling to attend school. Narayan throws light on the challenges which girls face in acquiring education in adulthood. Many Adivasi parents did not allow their children to go to school, fearing molestation and sexual abuse by outsiders. Education enabled Parvathi to escape from the Adivasi lifestyle and atmosphere, leading her to not want to stay with her parents or remain in her native place. Kocharethi and Kochuraman could not stop her from protesting, as they did not know how to convince her to stop pursuing her education. Parvati's mother was the first woman to marry someone outside the family, which, at that point in time, was an unconventional decision.

Education was a progressive move which subverted the traditional ideas of womanhood. Moreover, nobody could escape the flux of modernity. As they developed a growing desire to imitate modern ways and adapt to new norms, they started to wear modern clothes as well. They viewed modernity as an opportunity to challenge the different strands of power relations rather than count as mere followers of progress.

Modernization did not arrive without its own downsides, however, as new cash cropping methods, roads, and buildings severely impacted the environment. Symbols of modernity, such as cinema and education, aggregated the erosion of Adivasi culture. Kochuraman was disheartened to see that Adivasi children had

become apathetic towards cultivating the land, caring for their elders, and preserving their cultural values. When he started an educational institution in the hills, his intention was to end the exploitation of migrants in business and educate Adivasis about their rights. However, the changes that occurred in the Western Ghats were largely unexpected. His anxiety stemmed from his daughter Parvati's detachment from native culture due to her encounter with modernity.

On Parvati's initial return to her parent's home following her starting a new government job, she shared with them the reasons why she could not provide the financial assistance which they had requested. Above all, she had used her earnings to adjust to a more modern lifestyle and purchase items considered necessary for a person of such social status. Her parents were taken aback by the transformation in their daughter, for they recalled that she was the same girl who had formerly identified wholeheartedly with her tribal roots. They had not imbibed the idea that education would ever distance their children from their roots and ethnic identity; instead, they had expected that acquiring an education should be compatible with reinforcing their values. Despite this, Narayan commented that "Parvathi talked to them with an English accent and urban mannerisms. As she left empty-handed, the old woman said: Maruthungan's daughter is a fine talked, but she won't give you even a dot of lime to lick" (188). Adivasis frequently confront difficulties grasping intricate family dynamics and problems when securing a good job. The shift from tribal identity to individualism caused poverty and debt and instilled a sense of apathy towards society. Financial stability and the desire to adapt to modernity takes

them away from ethnic culture; consequently, their culture turns into invisible in dominant space.

Kochuraman had no trouble recognising the difference between the educated Parvathi and the uneducated Raghavan. While Raghavan represented the indigenous way of life and humanity, Parvathi and her brother Shekaran became victims of modernity. Raghavan's singing, which seemed to merge with the hills, provided a testament to the ways in which the culture of the Adivasis was being neglected in favour of capitalistic profit in the market. This neglect was particularly evident in the relationship between Shekaran and his sister, who aggravated the miserable plight of the parents. However, when Kochuraman was hospitalised, their anger towards their daughter melted, and they welcomed her back into their lives.

Mala Araya resistance to merchants was different from what could be found characterizing other tribal movements. Their primary mode of resistance involved assimilating into the dominant society through acquiring education, establishing new educational institutions, increasing crop production, cultivating cash crops, advocating for fair prices for their products, rebelling against invasions, and aligning themselves with the political parties. These resistance strategies cumulatively enabled them to confront exploitation.

Narayan deeply analyses how religious conversion affects every facet of traditional life. Aashan took charge of the project of Sanskritisation among Adivasis by installing the Hindu gods and removing the Adivasis gods: "Puliambulli," "Chathan," and "Marutha". Hindus and Christians have made this kind of an

interpellation and intervention. The novel narrates the transition of converted Araya as follows:

> It is not Venthikothu, it is Pentecost. We are people who have been baptized and become Christians. There's only one saviour, Jesus Christ. It is wrong to worship trees and stones. Man is a sinner. Death is the wage of sin. Do you want to gain freedom from sin and go to heaven? then pray to Jesus Christ on your knees. Brothers and sisters, all of you must be baptized. *Anti Kristhu* will burn everything to ashes. Believers will be saved. Therefore, brothers and sisters, be saved through the lord Jesus Christ. (149)

Hindu and Christian ideologies and cultures merged with the Adivasi way of life, altering their traditional identities as a result. Migrants succeeded in their door-to-door visit practices and, because of the increased influence of mainstream Hindu and Christian culture and ideologies in tribal lands, Adivasis were forced to assimilate into the mainstream religions. It is pertinent to acknowledge that after a certain point, the traditions of Adivasis and their uniqueness had widely begun to disappear from the Western Ghats. Mala Araya's sensibility and knowledge system were primarily framed on the basis of their lived space which was replaced by information on government reservation: "She's the first girl from this hill to pass the sixth form exam. Now she should get a job. It's time for change. We cannot turn a blind eye to that fact" (183). This can be considered as another reason for the withdrawal from traditional routines.

Hindus and Christians used various tools to promote their respective religions. Hindus gave information on educational institutions and the reservation

system in government jobs to encourage religious transformation. In order to seize the position held by the protector, Christians had not only used educational institutions but also relied on critiquing the divisive caste system to promise that Adivasis could achieve equal status only within Christianity. This approach proved to be an admittedly effective tool for the Christian community to attract Adivasis to their religion, as Baker writes in *The Hill Arrians of Travancore, and the Progress of Christianity Among Them*:

> Their great desire seemed to be that a missionary should permanently reside near; if it were the case, they felt they would not be deserted. The work seemed to be progressing, but the difficulties were significant for many of the inferior government officials and some Mahommedan and Romanist merchants, who had been in the habit of practising extortion with these simple mountaineers, feared that, if they learned to become Christians, the hope of their gains would go. (15)

Baker observes that not only the Christian advocates but also people from all religions had used different tactics and approaches to attract the tribals to their respective religions. Baptism was performed among Adivasis in Melukavu and Iruvapra in the district of Idukki, one of the first regions in Kerala to have successfully carried out Adivasi proselytization. However, Baker argues that it was not the missionaries, but instead the Arayar who demanded religious conversion and education: “This was in 1848. There were five men, from as many different hills, begging me to go and open schools among them.…...They stated that they wanted,

'no pecuniary help, as they had plenty of rice. They wished to serve God and not oppressed by anyone'" (11).

Christian beliefs harmonised Adivasis' collective unconsciousness not as spiritual guidance but as an escape from the *Savarna* hegemonic nature of the Hindus. Christian missionaries forced them to believe that the resistance of the weaker sections to the mighty authorities could only be achieved with the help of Christians. Some of the tribals of the Western Ghats, who were under the shackles of displacement and caste-based marginality, converted to Christianity, largely out of the hope that doing so would help grant them social equality. Narayan pointed out that social reformation through religious conversion destroyed the Mala Araya culture and tradition. Kochuraman laments:

> [A] courageous man had left the group. Daneil-Kunjaapan still bore the scar of that old wound on his shoulder when he and Kunjerukkan had defended themselves so bravely against the gang that attacked them. His hair was cut very short, he wore good clothes . . . Perhaps one who had the power to destroy them all as a community might have been born somewhere. He must be 'anthichristhu.' (154)

The missionaries were able to easily communicate with ethnic groups in the hills using various strategies: education, offerings, provisions, and shelter from Hindu atrocities. In "Isolation, Inclusion and Exclusion: The case of Adivasis in India" Xaxa says:

> The colonial administration needed manpower to man the expanding colonial administration in tribal areas, but no steps were taken to fill them with the tribal people. In fact, modern education critical to man the administration was not even given thought to in tribal areas. This were left to the Christian missionaries at the best they gave some grams to the missionaries for spreading education among the tribal population. (1)

Although Kochuraman wished to break down the barrier between outsiders and the Adivasis, the contradiction between the native thought systems and the new vision imposed upon them proved overwhelmingly confusing. However, there could be no doubt that the marginalised and victimised spaces were profoundly transformed by education. Trade and educational institutions enabled upper-caste Hindus to articulate caste and religion in an organised manner and to set a cultural and political agenda. Through their hold over the Adivasi's life and land, they dominated the Western Ghats and effectively used their power to transmit changing social and cultural values. These spaces were crucial in channelling Adivasis into the Hindu identity. Simultaneously, it was a domain in which caste and religious identities were constructed and contested. Interrogating these modern cultural codes in Adivasi life only reinforced migrants' presence instead of their removal, enabling them to perpetuate caste hierarchy as a result.

The author also depicts other subaltern groups, as well as the privileges Mala Araya enjoyed compared to those of the other communities:

> The Araya can enter thambran's courtyard, he can sit in urappura or veranda, he can draw water from the well to drink; but should not touch someone

> from the upper caste like kunjunni Pilla, whom they addressed as Pulluthambran. They were served well-boiled tapioca on plaitain leaves with a slight well-like depression in the middle to pour curd and also two green chillies. Thick, creamy coffee was served in bell metal mugs. When the meal was over they were given betel and tobacco to chew. (Kocharethi 119)

However, it is pertinent to argue that in the wake of modernity, they were forced to believe that they belonged to Hinduism, and Narayan affirms this alignment of his community with the Hindu religion. He finds a secure space in Hinduism and its traditions and institutionalises community identity on a broader scale. However, from the point of view of the tribals, this implies an unprecedented shift, one rooted in the acceptance of the prevailing religion and a movement further away from their own native roots.

Despite having cultural practices and traditions which make them unique, these tribals are formally classified as belonging to the Hindu religion as per the Indian Constitution. Similarly, the Mala Araya people have been labelled as Christians due to a rise in conversions, even though their older generation was raised in the Hindu faith. Unfortunately, these indigenous communities often feel overlooked and undervalued by society, struggling to assert their identities: “We continue as a blot, an error… If an Arayan goes to church, he’s called a Christian. But when it comes to education and employment, he reclaims his Mala Araya heritage” (200). Some of the historical events are also included in the novel to fix the time of the story: “India got Independence; seems congress are the rulers. They say the British have left. Yes, The Englishmen have left” (164). Narayan comments

that the Adivasis were quickly informed about India's freedom struggle as they lived amidst Christians, Hindus, and Muslims. Through his narration of India's union and the alliance of states, he highlights that Adivasis were kept updated about the daily news in India.

The novel provides a detailed portrayal of how the influence of different religions has gradually infiltrated and impacted the traditional way of life of the Adivasi community. Kochuraman dreamed of unity when he accepted Kandathil Krishna Pilla's idea that the Adivasis count as a part of Hinduism and can bridge the gaps between different communities. However, to consider their alignment with Hinduism alone is overly simplistic and one-dimensional. Hence, the Araya took necessary steps to interact with others through, for example, attending political meetings, which aided the Adivasis in their protest for equal rights and their efforts to maintain a consistent presence in the society. In the article "Literature and Social Mobilisation: Reading Kerala Renaissance," Aneesh K argued, "In Kerala, reform movement largely originated from the lower caste. From the very beginning there was an attempt to dethrone the caste system instead of some humanitarian attempts to rectify it" (750). Beyond mere contact with the mainstream, at the helm of these interactions is inherent ability to cope up with the social structure.

The meeting of Congress Party in Thodupuzha proved to be a novel experience for Kochuraman and his community, as it allowed them to encounter Kochu Madhavan among the so-called elitist members of society. This experience was particularly significant, as it generated a sense of belonging and inclusion among those who had historically been discriminated against and marginalised. It

created a state of unity and integration, in which the boundaries between the nation and the state were blurred, thus promoting a more harmonious and egalitarian society. Kandathil Krishna Pilla's utterances to Kochuraman, "Eda, how often have I told you not to call me thamburan" signifies the acceptance of the Adivasi identity after India gained independence (169). In this statement, one can observe not only that a new kind of self-awareness had developed among the Adivasis, but also that Hindus' perspectives regarding Adivasi identity had changed.

The concept of Adivasi identity held great significance for marginalised communities, as it provided them with a sense of security and protection against any perceived threats to their power and privileges. Kocharethi's words demonstrated that Adivasis often faced economic instability, leading them to sell their land without understanding its value or receiving compensation: "Son, we managed till now with the money got by selling the land next to the house to Pathrose Nanaaru. Now all that is left is the house and the land above it. If that too is sold" (202). Additionally, when Kocharethi encountered medical procedures, she did not understand them; she felt embarrassed and overwhelmed. As Narayan notes, Adivasis were not accustomed to modern medicine and surgery, making hospital environments unfamiliar and intimidating. "He clutched his wife trying to move quickly as he could. They climbed down the stairs; watched the dozing watchman warily, then like a flash of lightening they darted across towards the gate" (207). Kocharethi and her husband could not assimilate into the rapid pace of modernity, prompting them to eventually distance themselves from it altogether.

Kochuraman was not primarily concerned about the invasion of migrants but instead about their dominance over the social space in the Western Ghats, including the market monopoly and the ways of imposing power to exploit the Araya. Narayan believed in education's ability to alter people's attitude and enable the community to demand a fair price for its products. When the migrants introduced new agricultural products like rubber, the Western Ghat faced a drastic change in its geography and traditional crops. As merchants assumed power and began to control social structures and wealth, they initiated developmental activities such as the construction of roads, churches, and educational institutions. Kochuraman and his community were thrown into a new way of life brought about by the effects of modernisation. The entire tribal community faced the possibility of being thrown out of their space. Although the migrants arrived as saviours, later, they acted like feudal lords. The once solemn tribal living space had been transformed into a modern area without enough means to establish the tribals' identity in intimate zones like the family. They had to accept society's demands and assimilate into the new culture, because they could not find any other alternatives inside the community. This resulted in Kochuraman's addiction to liquor, Parvathi's aloofness towards her family and Sekaran's inability to find a job or to enter the field of agriculture or look after his parents. The external forces disrupted their intimate and familial spaces. The invisible yet powerful hands of the oppressors threatened the tribal identity. Subsequently, as the merchants controlled the economy, Kochuraman and his community suffered greatly from a lack of funds, despite cultivating spices and other cash crops to generate more income.

Living space is not just a physical location but also a place where one explores his or her identity with respect to the land. Initially, there was no hierarchical system or supremacy of any community in the area; instead, it was a space that fulfilled the primary living conditions and provided the means for survival. Kochuraman enjoyed his freedom as a son of nature. However, after becoming a debtor, he was confined to his home and local liquor shops. The unfair prices he received for his products left him feeling oppressed and made him question the system around him. Meanwhile, educated outsiders were unsympathetic to the struggles of the Araya people. Moreover, the economic centres were separated from them due to the intervention of merchants and harsh weather conditions, which made it difficult for the tribals to maintain their land and livelihoods.

Kochuraman endeavoured to build a rapport with the migrant population as a *vaidya* (physician) and a farmer, but he found it challenging to bridge the gap and establish true equality. Withdrawal from the centre of the economy and the experience of marginalization facilitated by illiteracy led to feelings of isolation and despair that deeply troubled Kochuraman, fuelling his search for a solution. When modernity claimed its right to rewrite history in the Western Ghats, it left the tribals with nothing but the loss of the eco-friendly life which they had once enjoyed. While outsiders were expected to do good for the land, their encroachment and domination over the land amounted to a stunning dismantling of the ecological balance. This disastrous impact of migration and modernity led Kochuraman to question society and himself. The new culture significantly impacted the tribal way

of life, perspective, and etiquette, as Kochuraman struggled to effectively engage with the growing distance, impoliteness, and detachment among the community:

> Instead of their usual pala hats, they had placed their second mundu, folded or twisted, around their heads in order to bear the weight of the sacks with greater ease. Their mundu was quite clean. Some of the younger ones did not have the traditional Araya kudumi tied above the forehead. They had also shaved their faces. Kunjunni noted that the Araya kudumi, was tied by winding the long hair just above the forehead. Some had metal rings on their ears. (118)

Because Kochuraman took great pride in his heritage, embodying both refinement and wildness, he naturally desired social equity. Merchants attempted to woo Kochuraman and his community with sweet words, offering subpar prices for their crops after quickly realising that they could easily exploit the tribe's innocence and vulnerability. Meanwhile, no one stepped forward to claim fair compensation for their products. The exclusion of the tribal community was thus strictly enforced within society. Though Kochuraman took initiative in providing education to Araya community and implementing the cultivation of cash crops, he was helpless in the face of gradual changes in tribal life. When someone in a tribal community fell into debt, that person embraced new cultural norms for the sake or pursuing a better life. The migrants and missionaries taught tribals new cultural practices, such as singing Christian prayer songs in the evenings, going to church on Sundays, attending missionary schools, and selling land to get out of debt.

The novel provides an insight into one of the most pressing issues of modern times: it delves into how the government's developmental projects mercilessly destroyed forests, leaving behind nothing but devastation. This was yet another example of exploitation, whereby the officials took advantage of the tribal workforce without any compensation. They falsely propagated the idea that the roads and other developments in the area were constructed solely for the benefit of the tribal people and that the government was there to help them. The officials even went so far as to claim that the deforestation was for the tribal good and not for their own greed:

> They will not be given any compensation for loss of dwelling or crops. They'll be punished for obstructing government work. Tell them there's a law that sanctions it. Kocheepan told the Arayar in a low voice that the constable might let them off if they bribed him. Frantic, the Arayar promised to do so (126).

The novel shows how the bureaucracy tamed the tribal for their progress.

The officials enforced fear among tribals through threats, dispossession and denial of wages and through forcing them to comply with their demands. In *Globalization and Postcolonialism: Hegemony and Resistance in the Twenty-first Century*, Sankaran Krishna commented on the situation as follows:

> The history of capitalist development shows that political and economic domination of some countries or regions by others (colonialism) and some classes by others ensures that the fruits of development are distributed highly

> unequally. It argues that historically development and underdevelopment are two sides of the same interrelated process, that the class structure of a society and the actions of the state are critically important in determining whether trade and commerce will have a positive impact on general well-being. (29)

In depicting Kochuraman as a champion of Adivasi consciousness, Narayan documents the ethnic cultural practices which include the worship of *paradevathamar*, the clan deities. Ittyadi, Kochuraman's father-in-law, performed the ceremony of showering grain and rice and received the *vechasrayamoorthikal*, the deities that protected the clan, from his father. Later, Kochuraman took responsibility for these practices. Many tribal members were concerned about the cultural changes within their geographic territory and the shift in religious beliefs and practices.

This novel is often referred to as one that captures tribal issues, given the sort of unrest they have been constantly encountering in their native place. While many converted to Christianity, Kochuraman, the pioneer in social change, represents the tribal agency. Kochuraman was revered for his deep connection to Nature and expertise as both a *vaidya* and a farmer. He saw it as his duty to encourage his fellow Adivasis to treat the land with reverence and respect and to nurture a sense of consciousness regarding their way of life. Despite his best efforts, Kochuraman was aware that the outsiders viewed the land as nothing more than a source of profit. While he was proud of the crops which he had grown, others saw nothing there except the potential for financial gain. Before the outsiders arrived, the Arayar had a well-balanced economy of which Kochuraman got to be a part. However, with the

introduction of new products and cultures, the Arayas struggled to keep up with the fluctuating market's calculations, while outsiders took over the economy and cultural codes of the hill. In addition to this, the tribals who relied on Nature as the foundation of their livelihoods were hit hard by unexpected weather patterns, experiencing prolonged periods of hunger and poverty as a result. They tried to educate their children to escape this cycle, but their efforts often proved unsuccessful.

Kochuraman's fight to preserve the identity and culture of his people was not personal. Rather, it was his means of understanding the society, perhaps even as a way to deconstruct the social structure as such. He resisted the Travancore people and fought against the merchants, using his tribal identity as a source of strength and unity. He aimed to bring equality to his people and protect his native land. In his frequent interactions with people in the valley, he experienced exclusion. The outsiders' attempts to foster a future human workforce from tribal members further exacerbated the existing power structure and hierarchy in class and caste. Their lives were caught between the forces of Nature and the outsiders; in addition, because the economic capacity of the area was already quite limited, such disruptions made it even more challenging to make ends meet. As a result, hegemonic cultural practices profoundly disrupted the tribal community's everyday lives. With their *savarna* thought, the Christians became the dominant force in the Western Ghats, wielding economic power and social status that the tribals could not match. As a result, Kochuraman and his community were culturally stigmatised and eventually excluded from the financial realm altogether. Kochuraman's crops, land, culture,

and relationship with his daughter Parvati were trampled upon, making the true cost of his loss immeasurable.

Over time, the tribal community became increasingly excluded from the mainstream society due to the deceitful motives of the merchants. Kochuraman recognised the need to break down the binary of exploitation, ultimately realising that these dichotomies were insufficient to allow one to fully comprehend the experiences of these individuals. Although he understood the extent of his exploitation, he struggled to address questions surrounding identity and space. Through the struggles of the protagonist and his community, Narayan pinpoints the sources of exploitation and discrimination. The price of a given product would vary greatly from one merchant's quote to the next, as the Araya's contact with people in the valley made them believe that they did not get the actual price for their products and that the price they received was not what the merchants had offered.

The tribal economy, which relies heavily upon crop production, exists in a tenuous intersectional space of caste, power, and desire for social equity. Narayan's work analysed the lives of the marginalised and identified the intersection of various stages of their experience, highlighting the subjectivity of the tribal people as they confronted the dominant culture. When an individual's personal space is invaded, there will be an innate and immediate urge to resist. In the article "Isolation, Inclusion and Exclusion: The case of Adivasis in India" in *Adivasi Rights and Exclusion in India* the situation is described as follows:

> Tribes who had control over land, forest and other resources and enjoyed autonomy of governance got pushed to the margin of the new political and

> economic system. There was thus the process of integration/inclusion of tribes into a larger system under colonial rule but a process of inclusion that came to be intertwined with the process of exclusion in the form of loss of access and control over livelihood (economic rights) as well as control over decision-making process in determination of their own life. (Xaxa 1)

An analysis of the Mala Araya's life indicates how they adapted to new survival norms, which in turn led to the eventual disappearance of tribal culture. Like the merchants, weather had its own role in defining cultural practices and traditions. The Mala Araya were primarily agrarians; at the very outset, their specific rituals were to appease the gods and seek their blessings for good weather and bountiful harvests. These rituals and traditions serve as a means of connecting with Nature and the divine and help to maintain a sense of community and shared identity. In *The Hill Arrians of Travancore, and the Progress of Christianity Among Them* it was argued:

> To the Christian, these people are of peculiar interest, because they do not, like Hindus, idolise evil. The objects of their worship are the spirits of their ancestors, or certain local demons supposed to reside in rocks or peaks and having influence only over particular villages or families. The religious services rendered to these are intended to deprecate anger rather than to seek benefits; but in no case is lust to be gratified, or wickedness practiced, as pleasing to these deities. (Baker, 6)

Despite her limited presence in the novel, Kocharethi’s character is significant in portraying the daily struggles of a woman. Deviating from the normal

practice of marrying her cousin, she chooses Kochuraman despite his status as an orphan. The novel critically examines the societal expectations with regard to women. For instance, she is expected to share equal work with men, along with her domestic work. Kocharethi is depicted as a woman who embodies bravery in the face of humiliation but shows vulnerability when it comes to making decisions or choices in her life. Narayan has picturised not only the microaggressions of the Arayar to protect their land and products but also the physical assaults faced by women in the community. However, he says that the Arayar had a matrilineal system, such that "the house always belongs to the woman" (16). When their daughter-in-law, Paapi inherits Kochuraman's and Kocharethi's homestead, she gains freedom and the power to make decisions on her own.

Ittyadi, Kochuraman's father-in-law, and his son Kunjadhichan held opposing views with regard to rituals and tradition. Ittyadi is the representative of the Mala Araya's rituals and practices and is highly revered by the community. Kochuraman and his brother-in-law adhere to their father-in-law's customs and traditions but are wary of wasteful practices. The statement "Who cares about customs these days?" clearly demonstrates how the Mala Araya had turned back from their cultural practices even before the arrival of new education standards (15). Their gods were *Chathan* and *Puliambulli*, and their distinctive beliefs are symbolised by "*Chavalilyan*" and "*Paradevatamar*". In *Indigenous Imaginaries: Literature, Region, Modernity*, Ramakrishnan commented on the situation as follows:

> To possess an identity is to be situated in history and culture. This state of being embedded is what literature tries to capture and communicate. From proverbs and dialects, folksongs, rituals and customs, stories narrated and remembered, and memories of tragedies and dramas overcome, a society creates metaphors and meanings that are constitutive of its identity and culture. If globalization means the erosion of the ground beneath their feet and their societies will end up as driftwood on the flood waters of virtual images that drowned them in their invisible waves. (77)

Despite seeming passive to outsiders, the inner lives of the Arayar were dynamic and abundant with rituals. However, they were susceptible to harm, as they navigated the world of power. The Araya community derives its family names from trees, reflecting their deep connection to Nature. The narrative articulates how rituals were a foundational part of their identity.

The farmers faced numerous challenges in safeguarding their crops against harsh weather, animals, and birds. To protect their land, they resorted to guns and hunted down animals that threatened their harvest. They revered God deeply and sought permission before engaging in any activity, including the potentially destructive act of clearing the earth for cultivation. Upon a bountiful harvest, they expressed gratitude through worship and prayer. Women were expected to participate in the worship during the season of cultivation, and the *Orukkal* ritual was performed to honour the departed. The Mala Araya community had rituals similar to those of the Hindus, and it is possible that this might be one of the reasons why Kochuraman identified himself as a Hindu by birth, indicating that the

community was associated with this religion. Nevertheless, Narayan argues that Adivasi consciousness and identity differ from the Dalit and cannot be tied to the rigid structures of caste. The Araya identity among the merchants was defined by his cultivation of cash crops, especially pepper. His status and acceptance within the community were secure when he had crops to sell.

The story "Thenvarikka" starts with the central character Ayyappan's thought, "Do the leaves fall with a cry?" (Narayan, 33), a question uttered as he looks at the Thenvarikka or jackfruit tree in his compound. This scene shows his profound connection to the tree and to Nature on a larger scale. The story delineates the difference between the old and new generations with regard to their opinions about Nature in terms of their perception, experience, and values shaped by historical, cultural, and environmental contexts. In the story, Ayyappan, the representative of the old generation, has a deeper connection to nature through traditional practices and wisdom, passed from generation to generation. He spent more time in his surroundings and depended on Thenvarikka for his livelihood. This satisfies his family throughout the year. His son Surendran decides to cut the tree, as he does not have any personal attachment to it. Ayyappan's words that he must be "looking for a way to settle his accounts at the toddy shop" (33) implies that Surendran, Ayyappan's son, prioritises economic growth above considering Nature to be a part of human life.

The jackfruit tree was full of new crops of jackfruits. However, according to Surendran, there was no reason to refrain from cutting the tree, for the men who came to Surendran were eager to complete their job. Though the tree had been there

for a long time, nobody in the family ever thought about cutting and selling the tree. This made Ayyappan wonder, "How could his son think of such a thing? (33) This question underscored the indifference of the young generation to Nature, in stark contrast with the older people's tendency to still consider Nature to be an integral part of their lives. The statement that Ayyappan "brought up his children without ever letting them feel the pinch of hunger" (33) articulates how much he depended on the tree for food. People like Ayyappan could not even think of felling the tree. To him, the tree was very personal, whereas to the younger generation, like Surendran, it held nothing except a potential for material gain.

The tree bears the fruit throughout the year, and "On *Sivarathri* in *Kumbham* there would be fasting and a wake. No rice was to be cooked at home. But the thenvarikka had God's plenty of Jack fruits to offer" (34) which fulfilled the appetite of the hungry with the delicious mushy puzhukku. Seeking permission from Nature before intervening in it was also common among the older people: "The Thenvarikka was losing a child. He had to ask for the tree's consent before he cut it (34). This passage indicates his acceptance of the tree as one of the family members. Nature always fulfilled the needs of humans and Thenvarikka, too, fulfilled Ayyappan's and his family's needs. From *Kumbham* to *Mithunam,* Thenvarikka provided a "feast of jackfruit – for breakfast, lunch and tea in the evening" (34). Narayan comments on how the jackfruit was a part of tribal life in the Western Ghats of Kerala. He delineates the food culture of the tribal as follows:

> The layers of the pulp could be separated, and the seeds with their thin coverings would be removed through a small cut made at the top. After

> removing the sticky fibre, the pulp would be cut into small pieces and boiled with coconut scrapings and curry leaves, chillies and turmeric for the taste to make the mushy, mouth-watering *chakka puzhukku*. The seeds had their delicacies to offer. A gentle squeeze would free the seed from the sac. Cutting it into pieces, one could make thoran or mezhukku piratty. If drumstick, mango or shrimp were around, it could chip in to make a tasty gravy. (34)

This description of the traditional tribal food, primarily made of jackfruit, throws light into his connection to Thenvarikka. The jackfruits not only met the needs of humans but also provided for the needs of animals: the fibre and skin provided fodder to cattle, while the fruits were feasted upon by the squirrels, bats, crows, and birds. Throughout the year, the jackfruit became an essential part of Ayyappan's life. After the season, the pulp was cut into thin pieces, boiled, and dried in the sun and kept in storage for the lean months. He remarked, "If the fruits gave a surplus of seeds, not all of them would be eaten. The ones left over would be stored in a pit in the corner of the kitchen in layers of mud and sand for the lean months of Mithunam and Karkkitakam" (35). He used jackfruit to avoid the problems of food scarcity and starvation in the family.

Jackfruit had a significant role in the food of the family each month, and women wisely used them. Narayan portrayed the situation as follows:

> But *Mithunam* and *Karkkitakam* could not intimidate the wise mother who had put away her stock of dried jackfruit seeds and pulp and tapioca. She would put the tapioca and jackfruit seeds in water to soak at night. In the

> morning, they would be boiled to make a puzhukku to be eaten with coconut chutney or smoked dry fish or some kind of gravy she could put together (35).

Children liked "the seeds fried in a pot or pan" (35) and "a couple of pieces of dried coconut to go with it would make it a feast" (35). Giving a detailed description of the variety of dishes made with jackfruit, Narayan says that tribals have an inextricable connection with Nature: “How thick the trunk was! Thick enough to hide a man standing on the other side from sight. Why didn’t you stay trim?” (35) Because the note on the tree showed how big the tree had become, that might be the reason why “people [may] eye you with greed” (35). From the time of his grandfathers to that of his grandchildren, Thenvarikka was with the family. Ayyappan felt that the tree had asked him many questions, making him remember its continuous effort to protect his family.

Surendran’s perception of Nature and its products can be seen in his words, "It is only a tree. Why should you fuss over it?" (36). His wife Leela’s intervention that "it is only because of the thenvarikka that my children did not starve" (36) did not prevent Surendran from cutting the tree; instead, he replied, "Look, with this blasted tree out of the way, we can plant up to sixty rubber saplings. If the yield is not good, we'll get as much as four kilos of sap every day" (36). This indicated that he valued land only as a space to generate income and, for that reason, he was ready to depart from the old beliefs and traditional attitude regarding Nature. Surendran was not ready to work for a living because he depended on Nature to do everything, remarking, "But how else can I clear all my debts? And how else can we scrape

together something so that we don't starve?" (36) This quote clearly shows his unwillingness to work hard. According to Narayan, the new generation was not ready to think critically about the impact of planting new crops such as rubber. Leela's warning, "But that will take at least seven years. Who knows what price rubber will fetch then?" (36), did not alter Surendran's decision to cut the tree in the least.

As he believed the tree was a part of his family, Ayyappan did not have the courage to see its destruction. He "staggered out of the house and walked away down the path. He felt the earth rumbling under his feet" (36). The story also discusses the consequence of the disappearance of traditional crops and the introduction of new crops as follows:

> Without the thenvarikka's shade the sun bore down fiercely on the pond and the turned it bone dry before summer was halfway through. The rubber saplings planted after the last rains wilted in the summer sun. The fierce wind from the hills blew away the coconut palm fronds Leela had now to walk to the house down the hill (37).

The transition from traditional to new crops altered their lives entirely, especially Leela's. The weather conditions after the removal of jackfruit tree changed everything. Because the land became barren, she had to bring water from a long distance. Children began to quarrel and fight because of hunger, and Surendran did not get water necessary to bathe and protect his body from the unbearable heat. Worse still, it was reported:

> Surendran saw with alarm that the rain had washed away a corner of the yard. Leela stood in the rain with a piece of cloth pulled over her head. Most of the rubber saplings had been uprooted by the rain, and there was nothing for the soil to withstand the violent water flow. The land on the slop had slipped. Boulders and stones were littered all over the yard. (37)

Surendran could not do anything to prevent these hazards. Ultimately, he realised the importance of preserving Nature by obeying the words of his father, who had a great deal of knowledge on traditional crops and the impact of modernity, such as cultivating the cash crops:

> Son, you don't know anything about the bond between a tree and the earth which sustains it. Cut the tree, and the earth will be angry. It withdraws all the water from human beings, shakes the topsoil loose, and sends the hills tumbling... Go, go away to where mother earth will take you into her lap. Go away (37).

The eloquent words in the concluding part of the story open up the discussion regarding the hazards which human pose to Nature.

More than a story from the viewpoint of the relation between man and nature, the short story, “Thenvarikka” does not mitigate the importance of the preservation of ecology. Furthermore, it throws light on the interplay between tradition and modernity, the clash between the old and the new generations, the relationship with Nature and the social dynamics of power control and resistance over land ownership, as well as the exploitation resulting from modernity. Ayyappan

is marginalised by his son Surendran because of his aloofness from progress, technology, and economic gain due to the adoption of modernity. Ayyappan considers thenvarikka as one of the family and seeks permission from the tree before taking fruits from it, whereas Surendran recognises land as nothing more than a source to be exploited. As far his son is concerned, Ayyappan's understanding of land is no longer valid. The traditional voice is silenced and ignored in favour of new technologies, leading to cultural erasure. Ayyappan’s way of viewing land is based on indigenous knowledge and traditional belief systems, which get pushed away in the face of modernity. His deep connection to the land was uprooted by the flux of modernity. The tribal practices, wisdom, and beliefs are disregarded by Surendran, who considers them obsolete and outdated.

Ayyappan resisted the cutting of the tree because he believed Nature to be a living entity. He connects his identity to Nature, as one can observe that Ayyappan's resistance was directed against the commodification of the environment. He protests against the mindset that sees Nature solely as a resource to exploit. Ayyappan believes that Nature is sacred and the very base of human life. His deep attachment to and faith in Nature could be seen as an act of defiance against modernity and the prevailing concept that Nature is an economic resource to be exploited for human progress. He holds on to the traditional values, which are increasingly overlooked by the present generation. Ayyappan's resistance can be interpreted as an attempt to preserve tribal identity, culture, and tradition from the corrosive effects of modernity. He fights to prevent the marginalisation of the tribal worldview; land is at the root of their spirit and one connects them to their existence.

Modernity’s continuous influence on tribal life is often disastrous. Surendran's perception of Nature as purely a source of wealth reflects a disconnection and distancing from the environment and Nature, which his ancestors revered. He is also different from old people based on his inability to understand or relate his life to Nature in a deep, more personal way, which limits his ability to develop a sustainable and holistic relationship with the world around him. The backdrop of the conflict between Surendran and his father, mainly built on the perception that the former seeks immediate benefits by neglecting the long-term consequences of exploiting Nature, affects the relation between them and eventually leads to marginalisation in a deteriorating environment. The intensity and frequency of the intervention of modernity significantly creates a desire for progress and development. Surendran cuts the jackfruit tree and plants rubber saplings with the thought that he could clear all his debts and secure a good life as a result. However, his initiative in rubber cultivation also exacerbated Leela's work and eventually led to hunger, besides the change in weather conditions. Though he believed that rubber would provide further economic development, this did not take into account the devastation caused by environmental exploitation. It can thus be seen that new developments in his region compel Surendran to resist the steady, unmaterialistic attachment to Nature to which the old generation clings.

The story is framed within the existing clash of ideologies, in which both generations experience a form of estrangement and repulsion from one another. The young generation disconnected itself from Nature and tried to use it only for material gain. In contrast, the older generation sought a more compassionate bond

with Nature, which ruled out all forms of exploiting the environment. The dynamics of power in society reflects a broader societal shift, particularly the tension between the preservation of tradition and the embrace of modernity, as well as the struggle for identity, where modernity tries to erase and transform traditional tribal life. Both old and young generations resist the forces that undermine their values, belief systems, and life through cultural change and economic pressure.

In his narratives, Narayan carefully focuses on marginalised characters, shedding light on their struggles and using them as a metaphor to explore cultural spaces. Through the journey of subjugation, choices, and self-assertion, Narayan's characters occupy and fuse with the lives of other marginalised individuals, all the while critiquing the exploitation of merchants. It shows how resistance overrides cultural modernity, as well as the social differences that alienate the tribals and entrust them with power, making them shed their helplessness. Thus, negotiations with the dominant culture by acquiring knowledge and through systematic resistance strategies will resettle the Adivasi's position gradually. These actions may lead to the dismantling of several stereotypes and social constructs regarding the tribal.

Kocharethi examines the search for Adivasis' identity and ideologies and traces their struggles and resistance in the advent of modernity. Narayan illustrates the emergence of feudal ideologies in the Western Ghats and the internal opposition to them. Although feudal doctrines and their impact on the lives of Adivasis by outsiders were formidable, they presented strong resistance and resilience on their part. Narayan skilfully depicts the natural world and its inhabitants, thereby looking into the consciousness of the Adivasis. He emphasises that the Adivasi identity

extends beyond the misguided construction of the dominant society. Viewing tribal identity through the perspective of a tribal is essential for comprehending human diversity. Narayan endeavours to reveal the Adivasi's untold, uncelebrated, and unrecognised lives in Kerala through the lens of a tribal perspective.

Chapter IV

Lived Experiences and Spatial Encounters in *Upara: An Outsider*

The personal connection envisaged through the "lived experience" of an individual contributes to his/her space in society, helps develop his/her identity and changes his/her perceptions and interactions with the world. It is particularly noteworthy when someone on the fringes of society encounters the dominant social realm. Autobiography, being the genre in which an individual provides an account of his or her life, becomes an apt platform to give voice to one's lived experiences. It has even been described as "discrimination and selection in face of the endless complexity of life, selection of facts, distribution of emphases and choices of expression" (Pascal 10). The first chapter of *Reading autobiography Now*, titled "Defining and Discerning Life Narrative Forms," contains the following memorable quote regarding this subject: "When life narrators write to chronicle an event, to explore a certain time period, or to enshrine a community, they are making history in a sense" (Smith and Watson). In this regard, Laxman Mane's autobiography *Upara an Outsider* delves into an analysis of how his lived experience aided him in navigating and framing a social space that was previously inaccessible to individuals from the bottom of society. It also explores how Mane encountered and dealt with these spaces to bring social change and experiences to the people on the margins of society. A comparative analysis of personal experiences and broader social structures offers a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of social mobility and the challenges faced by sidelined individuals. Autobiographies provide invaluable

testimonials of lived experiences, particularly from the perspective of subaltern lives. The introductory chapter of *Subalternities in India and Latin America: Dalit Autobiography's and The Testimonio* contains the following noteworthy observation: "Their writings carry the experience of caste oppression as also that of their struggle against the stranglehold of caste hierarchy in Indian society which continues to privilege the caste Hindu echelons" (Gupta). The testimonials are precisely the tools used by the subalterns to challenge the prevailing systems that perpetuate social inequality through providing the disenfranchised the opportunity to assert their identity and space. The state of Maharashtra has witnessed the growth of subaltern retrospective narratives, narratives of pain, transformation, empowerment, and historical truth. Kalpesh Parmar provided the following assessment:

> It is clear that an autobiography is the true representation of the extraordinary, renowned and popular man's life, achievements and experiences. But in the case of Dalits, ordinary men and women, who do not hold any prominent position in the social history and politics write autobiographies. They keep aside the established style of writing autobiographies. Moreover, it is important to see why the 'community' is given more importance than the 'self' in the Dalit autobiographies.

Similarly, Urmila Pawar noted in her autobiography *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* that "[t]he sufferings of Dalit are, like those of the black slave in America, the sufferings of her community. Not only this because the path to emancipation is also a social project rather than an individual one, the Dalit autobiography combines the witnessing and experiencing in an act of sharing that

gives it a political force" (xvi). These narratives of resistance indicate historical and sociocultural processes that act as cognitive performances and social agency. Coming down to tribal autobiographies, it can be noted that such narratives are not only personal chronicles but also ethnographic portrayals detailing the lives of those within tribal communities. Thus, such autobiographies become works of autoethnography. *The Branded* (*Uchlya*) by Laxman Gaikawad, *Camp* (*Tandal*) by Atmaram Rathod, *Against All Odds* (*Koletyache Por*) by Kishor Shantabai Kale are just a few examples of this.

The experience of marginalisation occurs to different people in a variety of ways and in a number of diverse spaces. It is a complex issue that disproportionately affects individuals who reside at the bottom of the society, leading to systematic inequalities and social injustice. In the colonial and pre-colonial periods, tribal lives were not discussed outside their own communities, as they remained out of touch with modernity and education. There were many tribal groups in Maharashtra, but they lived in segregated areas of society where these spaces were akin to being in a cellar. India's social structure separated people according to their caste, but the Adivasis were situated outside of those caste hierarchies altogether. However, the tribals living inside the mainstream society were considered equal to Dalits under the norms of the Varna system. The terms "caste" and "tribe" are deeply rooted in the Indian society and are used to indicate an individual's identity. Any differences between them were based on the social status of the groups. The caste system, rooted in the Vedic period, has historically sidelined and suppressed tribal culture and tradition. Naturally, these subaltern groups went into oblivion culturally,

socially, and historically. None of the subaltern people, especially the lower caste ones, had the chance to join the upper class, because they were born in the lower strata of society. Tribals have constantly been exploited due to the disparity in their perspectives and lived experiences, which makes them susceptible to manipulation by the dominant group. In "Adivasiness as Caste Expression and Land Rights Claim-Making in Central-Eastern India", Patrik Oskarsson and Siddharth Sareen observe that "[c]aste and Adivasiness are different but have potentially comparable functions drawn on during land rights struggles" (4). The Adivasi question is determined not by the variables of caste, but with respect to land use and appropriation, as well as natural resource extraction: "Land rights [. . .] established for Adivasis is crucially informed by the particular ways in which Adivasis' caste identity has been constructed partially at the bottom of, and partially beyond, the social hierarchy of caste in India" (Oskarsson and Sareen13). Tribal narratives revolve around this Adivasi question that goes beyond the above-mentioned caste hierarchy.

Similar to the Dalits, Tribals who had the opportunity to live in a hybrid community were forbidden from participating in festivals and fetching water from wells and were given stale food as the wages for their labour. Mane frequently asserts that marginalisation is primarily due to illiteracy and lack of representation in the power system of a given society. Though Savarnas and Panchayats governed the villages, the industrial sector was centred in the cities of Maharashtra. As a result, most of the discussions on subaltern lives and the Dalit ideological framework in India emerged from the state of Maharashtra. The Dalit intellectuals, such as

Jyothiraao Phule, Arjun Dangle, and Ambedkar, laid the foundation for the emergence of radically new perspectives on subaltern lives. Mane was born during the booming Independence era of India in the denotified category. The Kaikadi. Kaikadi are nomads who live in a solitary way outside of mainstream society, which is another way of saying that they suffer the same fate as other subaltern groups in Maharashtra.

Upara: An Outsider, Mane's retrospective narrative, is one of the earliest works from the voiceless, oppressed community. The story of Mane's life is one of remarkable transformations, including his move from the outskirts to the forefront. In 2006, he converted to Buddhism as a means of escaping the labelling that came along with Hinduism and this conversion to Buddhism was part of his attempt to find a new identity and a rightful place in society. However, this detail raises pertinent concerns about the potential of religious conversion. Alternatively, one might argue that the central question is whether religious conversion can change society's attitudes towards the individual.

Having grown up in a highly developed industrial zone of India, his perspective is unique, while the language and tone he uses set him apart from other writers due to his experiences of marginalization. His autobiography has been the subject of analysis in the field of Dalit studies, and his narrative provides a fresh perspective to the ongoing discussion on tribal narratives.

Mane's experiences in article writing in *Sadhana* and *Purogami Satyashodhak*, two journals from the Dalit activists in Maharashtra and his membership in various social organizations have helped him to express his life

before the world. Mane was honoured with the Tatyasaheb Kelkar Award from the Kesari Maratha Foundation Pune, the Bharati Vidyapith Award, the Sahitya Akademi Award, and the Ford Foundation fellowship. However, these awards did not remove the stamp of caste from his identity. He was one of the members of the Samajwadi Yuvak Dal and participated actively in the Morcha in support of *Sadhana* and Raja Dhale. His autobiography does not glorify or sympathise with his community but instead explains how education transformed a poor nomadic tribe into a revolutionary force in society. His autobiography succeeded in introducing insightful discussions about the politics of the erased subaltern lives, which the rigid ideological structures of the Hindu religion had refused to adequately address.

Mane's autobiography *Upara* sheds light on the issues and struggles faced by the subalterns and provides valuable insight into how education can transform the lives of these communities. Mane emphasizes that tribal identities face subalternity, the space of a marginalised person, and thereby defines his social space. The dominant society tried to remove him from every social aspect of his life. The opportunity to be a part of the mainstream society was not accessible to the tribal people. Mane focuses on the everyday lives of the tribals and counts the atrocities faced by the community as a result of the prejudices of the upper caste. Tribal consciousness comes with an understanding of identity that pleads for social justice and order. The graphic tale points out the long-silenced agonies of the Kaikadi and other communities. Shackles of superstitions and religious practices bind several sub-castes in Maharashtra.

G N Devy comments on the importance of addressing the heterogenous culture and communities in *A Nomad Called Thief: Reflections on Adivasi Silence* as "It is necessary to recognise that all Adivasi communities are not alike, that they are products of different historical and social conditions and that they belong to four different language families and several racial stocks and animistic moulds" (13–4). Mane aims to reveal those experiences and numerous realisations resulting from socioeconomic backwardness and caste hierarchy. Each incident in the author's life exemplifies the injustice he suffered and his desire to reach the centre of society. The disordering sketches of his life contained in the autobiography indicate the trampled-upon and shuffled identity through which he tries to fix his space in society. Mane uses his autobiography as a vehicle to search for the real problem behind the shattered self; likewise, it could also be seen as the journey from a broken to a unified, empowered nomadic identity.

Caste hegemony in society predetermines and constructs the identity of a tribe according to the perspective of those within the upper caste of society. Tribal and caste identity, in some situations, blend together to create the space of the criminal and untouchable through the process of othering. The scarcity of resources and opportunities, which were societal punishments, prohibited them from attending social gatherings. There have always been places where people gather to share their experiences, emotions, and feelings and create their cultural space. Still, in some parts of India, tribal groups were strictly forbidden from entering specific cultural spaces, such as everyday dining and drinking areas. The members of the dominant community often rejected them in public spaces and treated them as insignificant

beings, even though they were integral to their ceremonies such as marriage. In these ways, society is restricted or shaped by those who control the oppressed.

The atrocities Mane suffered in villages strengthened his involvement in different social movements in Maharashtra, especially Dalit movements. After the publication of his autobiography in Marathi, he said in the section "Upara and After" in the English translation *Upara an Outsider*, "A common man is carried away even with the idea that he will be felicitated at all" (7). The growth of printing technology and the opportunity to publish writings opened a new world of knowledge hitherto inaccessible to the subalterns. In Mane's words, "literature which never reached the common man in the past had reached them today" (8). He also commented on the way that even when individuals move out of India, their preoccupation with caste hierarchies persists. He recollects one such experience after the publication of his autobiography: "He invited me for lunch, but when he learned of the nature of my book and, consequently, my caste, he refused to entertain me. Even away from India, my caste pursued me" (9). Due to specific and continuous interventions of the dominant communities, these minorities were out of the economic sphere and are always represented as the "other". Although the tribal workforce was often considered vital for the development of the nation, one found that in the absence of proper remuneration, their exploitation became so dire that were effectively thrown to the fringes of economic marginality. The life experiences of Mane highlight the dominance of the Hindu upper caste in creating conservative political ideologies designed to allow them to maintain their status and power. The prominence and influence of these political ideologies are commensurate with their traditional

dominance in politics. The various ideologies and affinities of the dominant groups are clearly expressed on the basis of the conservative political system.

Tribal identities were often reduced to those of criminals, as can be seen from across many cultures and eras in history. From ancient Rome to India, disenfranchised people were categorized under various brands in different centuries and forced to work for the master and live in ghettos. Under The Habitual Offenders Act, the government renamed criminal tribes as “denotified tribes” on August 31, 1959. As a result of slavery and other such filthy jobs, they were compelled to live outside their villages. In the face of these unfair and wicked forms of discrimination, they were left in utter despair and social exclusion.

The title “Criminal Tribe” brought on suffering and marginalisation during the colonial period and continued even after India was formally granted Independence, leading to social exclusion and restrictions over taking village products such as cane. They were forbidden to enter the main streets of the village, and had to live on the outskirts, where oppression had been even more extensive. The hegemonic Savarna consciousness had constructed itself around the idea that others are criminals. Those who had the title of the criminal group were always in misery and put an end to the stigma of such a kind of branding. Likewise, they took the following oath under Dr Baba Adhav, the social activist:

> We are born as humans, not as criminals, beggars, or mendicants. We give up our medicines. We give up our mendicant heritage and criminal life. We are not criminals; we are not beggars! It is the society that has branded us so.

> Now, we want to live as human beings. Let us live as human beings. Resettle us (13).

It is important to note that the Kaikadi tribal group is not a single group but consists of many sub-castes with distinct dialects, cultures, conventions, and traditions. Gunthorpe comments on criminal tribes in *Notes on Criminal Tribes Residing in or frequenting the Bombay Presidency, Berar and the Central Provinces* as follows:

> They are the only ones of the race who still associate together, have no fixed residence, and are always wandering about the country . . . they are far less criminal, only confining themselves to thieving and picking pockets, etc., and as they are pretty criminals, and have not any organized system of committing crime." (54)

The British administration created camps with fences and gave the title "criminal" to some tribes such as Berad, Bestar, Bhatma, Kaikadi, Kankarbhat, Katabu, Lamani, Phase-Pardhi, Raj-Pardhi, Rajput-Bhatma, Ramoshi, Vadar, Waghari, and Chhapparbandh. In the history of India, tribal people were forced into labour and slavery, but the enforced identities of being criminals remained the same for a long time. The geographical territory inhabited by the Kaikadis was taken away from them because the title and the Criminal Tribal Act categorize those who move from one place to another as traders, pastoralists, and artisans. In the article "Dishonoured by History," Meena Radhakrishna described the situation as follows:

> The term ‘criminal tribes’ was concocted by the British rulers and entered the public vocabulary for the first time when a piece of legislation called the Criminal Tribes Act was passed in 1871. With the repeal of this Act (which was condemned by Pandit Nehru as a blot on the legal books of free India and a shame to all civilised societies), these communities were officially denotified in 1952. (para 6)

A child is branded a criminal with his/her birth into a tribal group, even though the child is completely unaware of the prevailing social structure. Mane believes that membership in the criminal tribe is disappointing, which was the main reason behind the inequality he experienced in life. Rallies were organised to remove those titles when new ideologies and revolutionaries came to save people from those “brandings.” He remembered that before leaving the village, Dagdya, the village chief, stopped them and said, “I have to search all your bags. What do I know about you? Beggars that you are! Motherfuckers! Who knows whether you have stolen anything from someone in the village!” (Mane 29). Villagers would not allow them to go unless these poor people gave them money, spoke respectfully, and touched their feet. His parents followed those customs to protect his family and his mother, as they were not bold enough to resist but silently accepted the discrimination. Mane said himself, “We are poor nomads… We go wherever our eyes, and your father takes us” (29).

The word *Upara* conveys the idea that his community does not belong anywhere, so Mane described himself as an outsider. The Tribals experienced vulnerability due to their fear of being “othered” and lacking privileges. It was not a

sudden change, but a gradual process managed by the dominant sections of society, because they feared the tribals would snatch away all the properties and destroy their hierarchical existence. The autobiography is one of the remarkable attempts by subalterns to shift focus from the upper caste spaces to the ordinary people in the ghetto, to focus on the space lying between the dominant and the other.

It is evident that subaltern communities have been subjected to discriminatory practices in all spheres of life, including not being admitted to schools, villages, ceremonies and celebrations, simply because of their caste, race, living conditions, and physical appearance. The title "criminal" produces new experiences for the subaltern which challenge their identity, while such labels communicate the idea that they are "others" to the rest of society. This experience of inequality has had a detrimental effect on those who were the victims. For this reason, addressing and mitigating the effects of this social injustice is crucial for promoting equity.

Mane expressed that he had the desire to be allowed entry into prohibited areas, knowingly or unknowingly, from a young age. Some of the tribal groups had the opportunity to live within the dominant family circles. Hence, the segregation they faced from those families was immeasurable. In a unique environment, starting one's life in serious competition with distinctly different structures is perceived as the beginning of the collective consciousness of rights.

Mane's autobiography features the elements that constitute marginal positions and the impact of childhood experiences on one's later life. His childhood experiences made him feel a sense of disconnectedness from others, as his

community was viewed to be different from the supposed norm. From a young age, he had to travel with his family for food and shelter. As a Kaikadi tribe member, he had no permanent place to call home. Kaikadi spent three or four weeks in one place, only to be deprived of land ownership. When their sources of income, such as cane and odd jobs, were reduced, they were forced to move from village to village in search of work and sustenance. He recounts the journey from village to village as follows:

> I was seated on Radhi's back and Sami on Bhagi's. Pushpa rode Radhi, seated in front of me. Kisnya was carried by their father on his shoulder, and their mother took Lali on her hip. Finally, she lifted onto her head the basket containing the kerosene lamp, the ladle and the kerosene bottle. And the caravan moved ahead. With a cane in his hand, the father would push the donkeys forward with encouraging shouts. Jaisingea's donkeys led the caravan. Behind them walked Jaisingea, Pari, Khagea, and Mhadya with two hens and a dog. Behind them came our donkeys. Two pairs of hens and roosters hug upside down, their legs tied and dangling on both sides of Radhi and Bhagui, touching my legs and Sami's feet. Mother walked behind us. Father was behind. (27)

Mane always failed to integrate himself into the frame offered to subalterns by society, even in childhood. He could not find any solution, though he was annoyed by the humiliation unfurled on him by the upper caste people. He narrates the difficulties he faced during his childhood as follows:

> We played mostly with marbles or flat pebbles, piling them one on top of the other and smashing them with a ball from a certain distance. A shirt, someone's charity, covered my body. Mended in several places, it was full of wrinkles. Shorts were a luxury. The shirt itself hung loose, serving the purpose of shorts as well. Its sleeves, too, were very long". Prejudice reigned in society, and lower castes weren't even treated like cattle. "You lazy bum! Your donkeys have ruined my haystack, and you are busy pissing into your own mouth! Oh! You beggars! May you die! You are a plague on our village! (17-8)

The Kaikadi tribal people often visited many villages but lived as beggars and repeatedly laboured in the landowners' fields and in their kitchens. They were pivotal in all upper caste functions, providing entertainment through music and dance and labouring in all household work. However, they were denied a life of honour and dignity. The tribals were forced to believe that it was their duty to serve the upper castes, especially in the kitchen, in the fields, at weddings, and in other forms of celebrations. The nomadic tribes needed to inform the village chief of their arrival and had to give him the number of people, donkeys, fowls, dogs, and so on. These subaltern groups were restricted to their allotted village by the dominant society and their community: "Each family had to go only to that particular village, as it had no right to encroach upon a village allotted to another. Anybody venturing to break this law would suffer the wrath of the community" (100).

The hegemonic intervention of the upper caste people compelled the tribals to believe that it was natural for all subalterns to follow their destiny without any

hope of trying to change it. While his father silently endured those violations, Mane questioned them. He helped his mother when she went to work and did not wander around with a begging bowl and washed clothes. Basket making and other minor jobs would not be enough to make out a decent living under such conditions. His education was frequently interrupted because his family shifted from village to village. Rather than delve into the specifics of traditional meals, he recalls that their diet primarily consisted of tea water infused with jaggery, stale *bhakaris,* and green chillies. There were even times when they went without food altogether. Non-vegetarian delicacies such as pork and goat were reserved solely for festive occasions. He reminisces that there was not a good memory of childhood to cherish.

According to Laxman Mane, Kaikadi people did not possess land but had the right to live in a particular village. The king of Phaltan sent Kaikadis in disguise to get news of the enemy, a Muslim ruler who controlled the fortress Varugad. They killed the Muslim ruler, but the villagers in Guirvi did not allow them to stay in the village. The chief of Nirgudi allowed them to settle there. Nirgudi comprises many communities, including the Dalit and upper caste, with a conservative lifestyle. Kaikadi was assigned to one of 12 districts serving the village, called Balutedars, and was assigned lowly jobs. The story of Mane's life is indicative of the ways in which slavery and untouchability are not passive but instead act as a power that conquers all walks of life. Mane's autobiographical account reveals not only his struggles with the villagers but also his experience of marginalization.

In *The Cracked Mirror*, Gopal Guru states, "The most useful way to thematize lived experience is to recognize that no element of choice or freedom is

associated with it. In general, we find ourselves placed in a situation and have to live with what we are given" (34). In those days, the lives of those on the outskirts were constantly under surveillance by the villagers. In crafting a unique experience, Mane draws the readers' attention to a crucial issue: oppression. Having grown up amid other communities of Satara, the author recounts his search for space through different occasions.

Mane vividly recalls the function and role of his community at the ceremonies and festive occasions for the upper castes. Father never declined an invitation to play music in public spaces, and the troupe members would wait for hours for food after performing in the band. Mane enjoyed these occasions because there was always a delicious meal served at the ceremonies. The Indian intellectual space was dominated by the upper caste sections of the society, and it represented a political orientation, which was extremely regressive in nature. Exploitation was not new to the tribals in Maharashtra. A child born into one of these categories could expect to be exploited by those in the dominant community, as even a small child is certain to be marginalised at school by being denied the same rights as the other children. Above all, the socially conscious, upper-caste Hindus were not ready to accept the tribals as their equals.

Mane observes that his perspectives and identity shifted when he met the emerging Dalit identities and the radically changing culture in Satara. These revolutionary Dalit ideologies created intellectuals and revolutionaries through continuous engagement with subaltern lives. This enabled the revolutionaries to understand the agony and injustice lying behind the atrocities perpetrated on the

tribals and to focus on the unique experiences of minority cultures. To study in a school, Mane had to give up his wandering life with the family and live in the security of his home in the village. A home is a place that ensures safety and identity, allowing for a sense of belonging. Living in a home is an indication of assertive membership in a society. While reminiscing about his life, Mane mentions that there was not a space for him to live like others.

It was in school that Mane first realized that he did not fit into society. The other students of his school treated Mane like an object of wonder. He was subjected to casual teasing and serious instances of molestation. He was the first child from the Kaikadi nomadic tribe to receive a formal education in school:

> A Kaikadi child . . . in school? All the pupils started teasing me in privacy. Moreover, I had the look of a mongrel straight from a dunghill . . . No student would allow me near him. The poor schoolmaster! He was a good man. He asked me to sit near the door. The pupils feared any physical contact with me (Mane 20).

This segregation did not deter him from pursuing his goal; unwilling to drop out of school, he continued his education: “I’ll go to school with a new resolve. I’ll not invite punishment for my mother. Even if bored, I’ll sit there… Musing in this manner, I did not know how time flew” (23). Unfortunately, the schoolmaster in the Palvan village refused his school admission, remarking, “You funny guy! Do nomadic beggars go to school . . . If they study, who will weave our baskets? Nothing doing! You want to study, Huh” (36). This bigoted statement should really be read as an expression of fear over the inclusion of the tribals in their world of

privilege. Entry into the knowledge system of the dominant class, a milestone achieved by Mane, was the solution for the people living on the brim of the society to avoid exclusion. As indigenous tribes encounter the dominant culture, the lack of a permanent, ancestral homeland can pose a significant challenge to preserving their unique tribal identity. The intervention of the dominant culture often fascinated and compelled them to follow many dominant practices accepted by the society, while they were shunned and excluded from the mainstream centre. This exclusion led to isolation and a sense of disconnection from their cultural heritage.

The teachers' conventional perception and dominant knowledge system excluded the subaltern students. However, that same school experience aggravated his resistance to the hegemonic social space, leading him to say, "The teacher would never talk to me. I could only sit there" (24). Mane points out many examples of the discrimination, which he faced during those days. The upper caste children did not allow him to play with them. When the tribal children felt hungry, begging was the only option. Because each community's language was so different, he could hardly understand the others at school when they spoke. He was the target of incessant jokes due to his unkempt appearance and lack of basic school supplies like books, pencils, and a slate: "Children would tickle my ears with the edge of a broom" (24). Fortunately, Akuba, a teacher in Nirgudi, encouraged him to do well in his studies. Despite this positive event, Mane struggled to identify similarities with others, and his inferiority complex led to absent-mindedness in class. Indya and Khagea were among his friends who saw him as the person from their space in the school. The subaltern children were left to grow up without the most basic requirements of

adequate food and clothing. This led to a tattered life, and these marginalised groups had to fight for their rights and their social status as human beings. By overcoming numerous obstacles, they formed their sense of freedom and identity. An in-depth review of Mane's life including social, geographical, historical, and cultural factors sheds light on how tribal communities respond to marginalisation and injustice. *In State, Society, and Tribes Issues in Post Colonial India*, Xaxa observed the following:

> Even when tribes have been conceived of as remaining outside the state, which has been the case most often, they have not been treated as falling outside the influence of civilization. Hence, tribes have been viewed as being in constant interaction with civilization. Consequently, tribal society has not been seen as static, but as engaged processes of change. (16)

Autobiographies from tribal people shows that their communities had constant interaction with the mainstream. Another incident Mane recollects is that his family was forced to flee from their village after he was photographed sitting next to an upper-caste girl in a class photo, as instructed by the photographer. After witnessing his father being beaten by Patil, he became determined to pursue his studies and marry a Maratha girl. He gained a newfound appreciation for education from his dependable mentor Kamble after completing fourth grade. However, he was left to fend for himself, as his family had to depart due to unforeseen circumstances. His father was not able to meet his son's needs, though he encouraged his son to continue to study. During lunchtime, he and his friends would scour the villagers' fields for food, and at times, they would resort to theft due to

extreme hunger. The experience of starvation often led them to dare to perform acts like the one recounted in the following memorable anecdote: "[we would enter] the sugarcane plot, one by one, without shaking the leaves of the canes. We would eat sugarcane until our bellies were full. And then, we withdrew from there one by one and went back to school" (Mane 99). Mane's journey to adulthood and education was akin to that of a feral plant, for he had to rely solely on himself without guidance or nourishment. He comments: "Our huts were in the open. At night, a kerosene lamp without a glass cover was lightened" and "I grew in this hut like a small plant growing on the dunghill" (72).

Child marriage had caused chaos in Mane's life for a while, but he eventually overcame this obstacle. He escaped from the custom when his father arranged his engagement to a cousin. Despite struggling academically, he was allowed to continue his studies. His frequent shifts from one school to another and his resultant poor academic performances were usual among the tribal students of the time. Fortunately, he was accepted into Shriram High School in Phaltan, where the headmaster, Shri N. M. Bhosle provided him with valuable academic support. Institutions such as schools provide a space for individuals to explore their identity, compare it with others', and learn to adapt to, change, control, overcome, or accept their situation. Mane received education from various schools and people, which made him capable of thinking freely enough to challenge societal values. Education thus facilitated his negotiation with society. Years later, he recognised the importance of education and other privileges in overcoming social inequality in the society.

The lack of necessities, such as shelter, food, equality, and social space left him vigorously fighting against the prevailing norms. Poverty is an everyday reality among indigenous people who have been forced out of their natural habitats. For Mane, hunger was not only a physical need but also a desire for social inclusion. His hunger for rights, identity, and a space in society fuelled his resistance against the obstacles he faced. Instead of escaping oppression, he experienced it, acknowledged the importance of representation, questioned the atrocities, and took pride in his rich heritage as a musician. Although they were talented performers, the tribals never received adequate wages or recognition for their work. In *Location of Culture*, Bhabha noted the following:

> In order to be institutionally effective as a discipline, the knowledge of cultural difference must be made to foreclose on the other; difference and otherness become the fantasy of a certain cultural space, or, indeed, the certainty of a form of theoretical knowledge that deconstructs the epistemological 'edge' of the west (31).

Subaltern spaces are often sites of exploitation, dispossession, and indifference which can contribute to an inferiority complex and potential mental health issues. Mane's family collected canes and made baskets but earned less when they lived in a controlled space. The deep forest and its darkness provided the space for them to practice their rituals at night, where no one could hinder their movements or stifle their ambitions and create a feeling of belonging. Their contact with Nature further expanded their innate abilities and instilled a sense of vitality, autonomy and empowerment in them. Travelling from village to village to collect

canes enabled Mane to experience novelty and think more deeply about who he was. Collecting cane from empty lands often led to his being caught red handed by the dominant castes. Mane recounts the plight of his parents. “Both her hands were stained with blood. Her face was swollen. My terrible cries created a din. Father’s hands were tied, and his head hung low in shame” (61). Things were different in the new place, college, where nobody ragged him, and he felt happy to be called by his name Mane. He felt like a newborn, with no mention of caste: “To my great satisfaction, nobody ragged me. Everybody called me by name. Until now, I had been addressed only as Laksha. Now, everybody addressed me as Mane. I felt the happiness and freshness of a newborn. Nobody talked about the caste-low or high” (122-3). There were differing perspectives and behaviours in villages and small towns.

Mane’s father had a significant role in the development of his identity. He used to tell stories of his lived experiences and culture. He was keen on ensuring that his son receive formal education. He was a great devotee and a regular visitor to the goddess Khanduba in the festival month of ‘Pousha.’ His father also had great skill in music. He assembled a music band and usually got contracts when there were no menial jobs. He followed all the rituals and practices of his community. Some of the practices are traced by Mane in his autobiography. For instance, there is a religious practice, in which offerings of the rooster are made to the gods; afterwards, the same meat is consumed as food. It is believed that children are not allowed to eat anything before the offering is made to the gods, and anyone who disobeys the ritual is considered rude. After the religious practice, country liquor is distributed to all

family members. However, the reason behind most of these rituals remains unknown. Additionally, before entering Nirgudi, they throw five stones on a heap as a part of their tradition. Whenever there were odd events in his house, he opened his basket, pulled the deities out in reverence, muttered a few words, and applied vermillion on everybody's forehead. People used to visit him for medicine. In other words, it was not Mane but the father who represented the ethnic perspectives of the Kaikadi tribe. He kept some stones as idols. Before tying their tent on the outskirts of villages, near the river and under a large tree, the following things needed to be done:

> Father removed the basket of the idols from his back and kept it carefully at the base of the tree. Then he joined his palms reverently and prayed: Bless us with good luck . . . He took a pinch of vermillion from inside the basket of the idols and threw it on the ground . . . Sir! How could we not come at all? Whatever the Mother Goddess bestows on us, we must accept. What else can we do to fill our bellies? God makes us travel from place to place in search of food. Give your blessings! I assure you . . . next year, we'll come early. (30-1)

In the article, "Honoring Tribal Spirituality in India: An Exploratory Study of Their Beliefs, Rituals and Healing Practices," Shannal Rowkith and Raisuyah Bhagwan observed the following:

> [T]he tribal way of living, knowing and being in the world is embedded within both the simplicity and the complexity of their psycho-spiritual–socio-ecological cosmological worldview. The tribal community was found

> to be indigenous to its area for many generations and has, as such, developed its own spiritual worldview. This unique spirituality is characterised by a reverence for nature, an emphasis on family bonds, and a celebratory culture and rituals deeply ingrained in their psychological makeup. (11)

The only ambition on the part of Mane's father was that his son should be able to read. Moreover, he was not well off looking after the whole family. Being a ritualist, Mane's father resolved to provide his son with education. However, he later became apprehensive that his son might sever ties with the family and community. Mane could not fulfil his parents' aspirations, despite being the eldest son. Father feared the Panchayat rules when he learned that his son had married an upper-caste woman. The impending ex-communication from the community left him anxious: "My boy, keep this in mind: One may even eat the dust to preserve one's caste. There is no salvation without caste" (Mane 167). His father had been a victim of social disparity, and society never accepted him as a human being. His space within the community was closely monitored and controlled by others. Considering the dominant communities and resistance from the marginalised, Foucault made the following pronouncement in his work *Power*:

> But what makes the domination of a group, a caste, or a class, together with the resistance and revolts that domination comes up against, a central phenomenon in the history of societies is that they manifest in a massive and global form, at the level of the whole social body, the locking-together of power relations with relations of strategy and the results proceeding from their interaction. (348)

Indian culture developed from ancient myths and fables, which delineate the idea that some people are not elite but are instead untouchables. Thus, the interaction between power and resistance varies greatly with cultural variations. However, individual agency, as exemplified in Mane's life, has the potential to bring about changes and social movements that transcend the overarching structure of power, offering a hopeful and optimistic view of the future.

Mane picturises the unique practices of his community. Black goat, groundnut oil, five coconuts, betel leaves, areca nut, lemons, green bangles, a small vermillion box, a green blouse piece, and turmeric were used to celebrate his youngest brother’s birth. They travelled far away from their place to do puja at night. At midnight, without an idol, they sacrificed a goat and used the meat as food. Festivals constitute a significant aspect of their lifestyle and Mane enjoyed participating in them, as they provided the only opportunity to congregate with other family members. The community held strong religious beliefs and worshipped various deities, including Kalubai, Yellamma, and Laman. Before beginning any activity, they would adorn their foreheads with vermillion. A grand chariot procession was organised during the festival to pay homage to the goddess Khanduba. This event was attended by nomadic tribes such as Dhangar, Kaikadi, Makadwale, and Davri, along with performers like Murlyea and Kalawanties. The festival served as a time for settling disputes and arranging marriages; likewise, tribals from far and wide would gather for the celebration. These gatherings were the focal point of being a part of society. During this celebration of Kalubai, the goddess of Kurvali, members of the Kaikadi tribe return to their village wearing new

clothes, and families from all tribes gather near the temple for the festivities. Following the meal, members of the tribal communities would gather behind the temple to partake in various activities. These included borrowing and lending money, buying and selling livestock, resolving disputes, processing legal cases, and showcasing their musical skills. The Kaikadi and Makadwales had an inborn musical talent and believed that the blessings of the Mother Goddess shielded them from supernatural entities. Although they adopted certain aspects of the upper-class culture, their hybridised lifestyle was solely for preserving their identity and space.

Mane has always been the combination of his father's talent in music and the rebellious spirit shaped out of his raw experiences. He had to adapt to the changes in their way of life by finding new sources of income. Mane's proficiency in music helped him to earn money during the festival seasons. Mane participated in performances led by his father, which boosted his confidence and helped him embrace his identity. Gradual change helped the tribals accept themselves, as their progression as illiterate tribals from subalternity to revolution had been the direct result of education. Saving money was important to men in the family so that they could celebrate festivals, the happiest moments in their lives, free from any external control. Their skills were evident from an early age, and they often participated in weddings and other celebrations as part of a band, even challenging rival groups: "Send their families away, throw their musical instruments into the river . . . They started abusing and blaming our caste, saying we had no ethics" (127). Though the upper caste enjoyed their dance and music, tribal communities were out of the mainstream. It could be observed that the Kaikadi community has maintained its

distinct dialect, unlike other tribes that have adopted Marathi. In addition, there appears to be a tendency for social separation among the various tribal groups, with limited interaction, social visits, or relationships between them. Mane adeptly employed the languages his community spoke to create meaningful interactions with them. However, when conversing with his parents in their own native language, his wife was precluded from comprehending the conversation. Mane posited that language barriers often act as a deterrent to recognising and addressing acts of violence and abuse within his community.

Resistance was an integral part of Mane's identity, as many layers of oppression from childhood to adulthood reinforced the notion that he was the "other" in society. The systematic exploitation and oppression from the dominant community, his tribal origin, and several direct and indirect practices among the communities did not prevent him from overcoming the barriers in his life. Instead, these barriers served as a spark that helped Mane map out the realities of the tribe's life. He questioned injustice whenever he witnessed exploitation, even though this habit sometimes led to his expulsion from home and village. This questioning, which marked a significant change in his life, is an inextricable part of his resistance against hegemonic dominance. Mane realised that marginality prevented him from improving his life. Social exclusion due to his birth into a lower caste haunted him and accelerated his spirit to invade the heterogeneous society.

In *For Space,* Doren Massey argues that "one of the effects of modernity was the establishment of a particular power/ knowledge relation which was mirrored in a geography that was also a geography of power (the colonial powers/the colonised

spaces)- a power -geometry of intersecting trajectories" (64). In Nirgudi, a particular area was reserved for every community. Lower caste people were identified through their living space. Kaikadis inhabited the riverbanks or deserted places far from village settlements.

Marginalised life brought him closer to Dalit communities who interacted with him intimately on a regular basis and were concerned with his social well-being. Systemic oppression became the common thread that connected the tribals and Dalits wherever the experiences of atrocities bred proximity. These contacts are governed by Dalit ideologies and political considerations, which enabled them to maintain this unity. It could be observed that the hegemonic status of the Savarna community is one of the fundamental factors that foiled the facilitation of these encounters between different oppressed communities. The whole family had to endure suffering as a result of the disobedience of a single member.

Rambhau, a young social activist who belonged to Mahar, one of the Dalit communities, could empathise with Mane's family when they were caught for a theft in the village. When this Dalit leader competed in the election, Mane was in the seventh grade, and he worked for him. Though Rambhau was not elected, this small step toward political representation opened the author's eyes to the importance of unity and the impact of lower castes' intervention in Maharashtra's political landscape. Rather than make exaggerated comments about the behaviour of the upper caste people, Mane shared his and other marginalised communities' efforts to resist their dominance and become a role model for all tribals. Mane emphasised his interactions with revolutionaries and intellectuals, which helped him speak out on

his community's behalf and write articles about the poignant life as well. This caused him to reframe the role of tribals in society when he collaborated with Dalits to raise awareness about the concerns and rights of tribals in Maharashtra. Mane emerged as a champion of inclusivity and a beacon of hope for his community. Whenever he felt like an outsider, he sought the company of social activists and aligned himself with the political imagery of the subaltern.

The caste system has been utilised as a means of depriving millions of Dalits and tribals of their fundamental rights by limiting their entry into social arenas, negating their identities within these spheres, and disallowing their representation. In this vein, the Dalit movements and intellectuals had been instrumental in Mane's life, as they worked to confront the contrived savarna Hindu ideology at the grassroot level and exposed the danger of social exclusion. In *Location of Culture*, Bhabha states: "The difference between other cultures is other than the excess of signification or that trajectory of desire. These theoretical strategies are necessary to combat 'ethnocentrism', but they cannot, of themselves, unreconstructed, represent that otherness" (70). Considering Bhabha's words, the superiority of the dominant culture is inadequate to represent the deep-rooted, lived and historical cultural otherness of people such as the tribal.

Mane did various odd jobs in his early life, including helping his mother at the village chief's house and playing music with his father from a young age; these provided opportunities to experience the behaviour of the dominant class firsthand. The villagers held him in high regard for his hard work and determination to study: "Good! In the Kaikadi community, you are the only one who has been studying"

(106). But the villagers lacked humanitarian considerations, and their surveillance restricted his freedom. Villagers caught him red handed once, when they saw him sitting with upper-caste children during a marriage ceremony. Gopal Guru states in *The Cracked Mirror*, regarding the topic of lived experience, "They would argue that their lived experience is rich enough and can stand on its authentic terms and that it does not require any theoretical representation" (23). In other words, his lived experiences from childhood onwards become a factor in shaping his sense of identity, and he realises that restrictions are limited to some, not to all.

Narayanan, a close friend of Mane, was another influential figure in his life. With the support of his friends, he overcame the challenges and passed the exams. Mane discovered an unwavering source of support in his circle of friends. They consistently offered their encouragement whenever he performed with his band. While residing in Phaltan, he shared a room with his friends, Ramdas and Popat Jagtap, who provided him with a space, in which to study. Narayanan offered him financial assistance during times of hardship. Narayanan's mannerisms and conduct deeply impacted Mane. Additionally, he made it a priority to visit and engage in conversation with those less fortunate. While in college, he gained a fresh outlook on life, and the marriage of Narayanan was a social revolution that instilled in him the confidence to take control of his destiny. Due to the controversy surrounding his inter-caste marriage, Mane had to face many issues. The real issue was that they did not get to go home after their marriage because of their caste. Mane had trouble finding a home in the city, because many house owners only rented their homes to the upper caste people. The author and his family were provided accommodation by

a Muslim gentleman, but the former struggled to secure employment, leading to considerable financial difficulties. Even the author's parents were initially reluctant to accept Sasi, his wife, into the family.

Mane was a great follower of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj, and Karmveer Bhaurao Patil, the renowned social reformers. His helplessness, even after completing his education, along with the segregation he experienced in childhood, led him to take up various jobs, including selling newspapers, bread, and blouses. He also worked as a cinema doorkeeper, liquor maker's assistant, and band player to achieve financial stability. In Mane's life, education was a tool that connected him to many intellectuals and progressive organisations. He could get these contacts and discussions because of his formal education, which shed his inhibitions and barriers to pursuing his dreams and working for a more equitable society. In this way, Mane could finally secure a job with the aid of social activist Narendra Dabholkar and the intervention of the organisation Samajwadi Yuvak Dal.

Education enabled Mane to reject the moral values of the higher class and question certain traditions which divide humans. He embraced a new perspective that prioritised the inclusivity of all people, regardless of their caste, but was met with numerous layers of hierarchy that undermined his efforts. While there was some progress in the cities, the winds of change were barely perceptible in the villages and the oppressive nature of power was normalised and pervasive. Guru provided the following argument relevant to this point:

> [U]ntouchability both as practice and as consciousness finds it difficult to remain on the surface of social interaction, as was the case in the feudal past. Modernity forces it to slide further down to the bottom of the hierarchical mind. Differently put, untouchability as a discursive practice plays itself out in a much subtler form than ever before. Untouchability in modern times is forced to hide itself behind certain modern meanings and identities. (203)

The incidents and behaviour recounted in his autobiography were not isolated events but were instead indicative of a culture of discrimination that allowed for exclusion, ghettoization, and denial of essential services. Mane comments that Indira Gandhi was the prime minister when he completed his education. He says the government introduced policies, programme, and welfare institutions to uplift marginalised communities that did not reach them, especially the tribals. Moreover, he observed that while welfare offices were accessible to members of the Scheduled Castes, there were no resources for those from unclassified or inter-caste unions. Mane claimed that the Welfare Department assisted the untouchables only. He questioned the classification as follows:

> A 'Mahar' has at least his profession of removing dead animals' skins. He does have a roof over his head, though it may not be in good condition. But I . . . Mother Earth has no place for me; my hands never reach the sky. A man who resides at places where people come to defecate, is he not an untouchable? If he's not, then who is he? And he who moves from place to place to earn his livelihood, what is he?" (191)

The autobiography invites attention to pressing issues, such as the lack of a permanent house and the discrimination based on caste, as they do not fall under the formal classification of any caste or do the enforced jobs assigned to each caste: “Mother Earth has no place for me; my heads never reach the sky . . . Right from my childhood, I had been a victim of rejection and contempt, and the scars were difficult to heal” (194). His narrative throws light on the insecurity of the tribals and denial of their existence due to the absence of a permanent residence.

In the introductory chapter, “Introduction: The Politics of Post Space,” in *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel*, the following is highlighted:

> Without space, any negotiation of place is incomplete. For when the meaning attached to place is so often an imposition of signification, it may be that to claim the abstraction of space is to subvert totalising definitions of what a particular location signifies. This is not to repeat the hierarchy and reject the importance of 'place’ but consider both the place and space. Rather choosing space is a conscious attempt to draw attention to the fact that making space from the place -reinstalling the undefined -maybe as in as the more common focus on the action of redefining that place through territorial reclamation. (Sara Upstone)

Panchayat Samiti is a local body tasked with deciding issues related to villagers; Jat Panchayat holds an important position in village life. This cultural space shapes social interactions, such that no one can escape the clutches of Panchayat rules, which requires one either to return to tradition or embrace a new culture. Those who break these restrictions face severe consequences:

> The guilty man was made to carry (on his head) an earthen pot filled with shit. As he went around the idol of the god, each of the members of the Panchayat threw a stone at the earthen pot, making a hole into it. Through such holes, the shit and piss in the pot fell on the body of the carrier, and the poor fellow was coin order to ensure tribal space, political mobilisation is required completely drenched in that. (109)

Inter-caste marriage was portrayed as a grave issue in those days: "They took neither tea nor water nor food in my house. In fact, this was a true ex-communication of me and my wife by my community" (186). Those who violated the rules of the Panchayat had to pay severe penalties, often involving significant monetary compensation. The petitioner and the defendant had to pay the amount demanded by the Panchayat, and neither party could present his or her case. Instead, one's guarantor would communicate on that person's behalf. The Panchayat's authority extended to all aspects of community life, including personal relationships, which more often ended up furthering the marginalisation of women. The Panchayat would intervene in cases of extramarital affairs or other socially unacceptable behaviours; the severe consequences of such interventions often left a lasting impact on those involved.

The status of women in both the patriarchal dominant and subaltern communities amounted to subalternity. The author examines the ways in which patriarchal authority dominated women's space through the assimilation and appropriation of Hindu ideologies and by marking women's identities and spaces. He also describes how patriarchal power shapes the lower castes' history, identity,

resources, symbols, and cultures. Women were judged not on their physical appearance but on their ability to work equally or more than men. Mane remembers his parents working tirelessly to support them, even to the point that he never saw them eat. Mane's parents deeply understood him and formed a strong bond with him; their relatives helped him during his mother's pregnancy: "Whenever there was a wedding in a rich man's house, Mother would get a lot of work such as cleaning the ground inside and around the wedding pandal" (93). In wedding seasons, they would assemble there: "Serve us, please! Have mercy on the poor! Throw some bits on our plates!" (94). His mother was portrayed as determined and resilient, embodying the strength and perseverance of the subaltern woman who never forgot to send money to her son. She never complained but worked hard to balance her life.

Mane's beliefs and experiences underwent a transition after his education. He began to question some of the practices and rituals of his community, such as child marriage and the isolation of women during their menstrual period. He saw these customs as meaningless and harmful to women. However, Mane also narrates his fond memories of the rituals and practices performed by his father: "My manners had improved greatly. I had begun showing a certain respect to my parents, and my language and expressions had undergone a sea change" (149). He acknowledges that poverty often led women to steal grains, but they would plead for mercy when caught, as nobody was there for them. Similarly, Sasi, his wife, challenged the patriarchal norms of the Hindu tradition reinforced by the Panchayat. She bravely spoke out against the mistreatment and exploitation of women. In one of the significant episodes of the book, Sasi declares: "I am not observing the fast, and

don't share your views. I have no faith in such rituals. I don't believe in rebirth, and by enacting this drama, I am unsure whether I'll get the same husband in seven of my future rebirths" (203). She goes on argue, "Why should a husband always beat his wife? . . . If a wife beats her husband one day, what's wrong in it?" (206). The woman was supposed to adhere to patriarchal rules to ensure the purity of the tribal body.

The women in Mane's family had a mutual understanding, but they endured beatings for the sake of the family: "Nani, Kaki, and Mother never quarreled among themselves. For the sake of his brothers, at times, Father even went to the extent of beating up Mother, for he could never hurt his brothers" (70). The patriarchal powers misled and misused the rights of women. Foucault in *Power* extends the notion that "Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are 'free.' By this, we mean individual or collective subjects faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, ways of reacting and modes of behavior are available" (342). Beating and controlling the women were normalised in the community. His aunt Pari, one of the victims of patriarchal power, stood out among the Kaikadi women due to her good looks, fair complexion, and slender figure. Unlike other women of her tribe, she had a regular habit of bathing and combing her hair. Her movements were also noted for their swiftness and gracefulness. Even from her own husband, she constantly faced questions such as "Are you a Brahmin . . . or is your body full of shit. . . ? Why do you have to bathe every day? He would abuse his wife soundly" (81). His memory of his mother's words indicate how much they were conditioned and kept themselves away from

dominant communities, such as when she said, “When we live on the dunghill, we should live like dirt. We must not imitate the people who live in bungalows. We are street dwellers. We are open to the public’s gaze all the while. What if somebody casts an evil eye on you?” (82). Restrictions did not end in their personal routine. They were expected to return home before sunset; otherwise, their husbands would not allow them to enter the house, and they would have to return to their parents. Nobody in the village had the right to give them shelter. Their father would present them before the Panchayat for the verdict.

Mane would not forget to mention that there were women who strictly followed the tradition: “Master! Even if the caste is different, the tradition is not. A husband washing his wife’s clothes leads her to a sin. And how is she going to absolve herself of this sin? She will go to hell, that’s sure!” (202). Mane points out that women were conditioned to follow patriarchal norms. If a woman disobeyed her husband or another man to take the responsibility of the household work, it would be considered a sin for her to do so. He also states that “If a woman committed adultery, her entire family would be excommunicated. An excommunicated person would be forced to leave his house and his village” (101). Though tribal women had the right to marry twice or thrice, this had to be permitted by the Panchayat.

The identity of women was an issue that was developed with respect to men and their exercise of control. Rituals at night were forbidden to women in the Kaikadi tribe: “The women have no right to come. God doesn’t allow it” (77). At the same time, he says, “In our community, women did marry twice, thrice. If a woman was abandoned by her first husband, she could take a second one. Then, leaving her

second husband, she could even return to her first husband if she desired" (148). Subaltern subgroups differ significantly in culture, yet the experience and struggle of women for equality remain the same. Women faced physical assault from men, did household work, worked for low wages, and slept little. They never bathed or brushed their teeth, with the hope that this would prevent them from being raped by the upper caste men: "We are low-caste nomads. These things are a way of life for us, not for them. For them, a woman's honour is as delicate as glassware" (148). Husbands had the right to mortgage their wives. They were murdered after rape. Men in their community could not take revenge as they were the victims of the Savarna society and murder cases slipped into oblivion.

Gajra, the wife of Pingla Joshi, a neighbour of Mane, is another example of the victimisation of patriarchy. She could not reach home before sunset, even if it was only for the purpose of needing to buy medicine for her husband. She was excommunicated from the community by the Panchayat in response to her delay in reaching home. In addition, while investigating incidents of theft in the village, the police regularly searched the Kaikadi household, with Gajra's sons frequently bearing the brunt of suspicion. These repeated acts of humiliation eventually caused her sons to abandon her. Mane narrates another example from the upper caste community. At a grand wedding ceremony held in a village, a dispute arose when the bridegroom requested to take a photograph with the bride, a practice which was not customary. Unfortunately, the bride's father refused to allow it, resulting in the cancellation of the wedding. This unforeseen incident profoundly impacted Ratna, the bride, and she could not fully recover from the emotional shock. He provided the

following testimony: “Whatever I lived, experienced, and saw, I poured into writing. I lived it all again. I do not mean to blame anyone . . . From our Panchayat’s point of view, the very writing of this book is a crime, and I am aware of the provision of the punishment for such wrongdoing” (6). This reveals the self-reflexive consciousness embedded within Man’s autobiography, positioned as it is between his self and his community. His lived experiences were the pillars of the formation of his identity.

Caste and cultural hegemony always pulled him down, as he realised and reacted to the violations and oppression, which led him to leave his village and parents. He scrutinised the various factors of people's marginalisation and examined why some are the “other” in their own societies. Such a marginal position in society produced in him the feeling of otherness and led to the development of identity consciousness from a young age onwards. Through the transition from an ignorant and illiterate boy to a socially conscious individual, Mane comments that the distinctness of tribal language and cultural uniqueness indicate that tribal identity differs from Dalit identity. In order to develop his perspectives, he began to create more connections with developed communities and overlapped identities. These interventions and discussions helped him to respond more organically to injustice, as he realised that his tribal identity is unique and different from Dalit identity. His perspective was profoundly shaped by his participation in Seva Dal, a social organisation and his interactions with Professor Patagonia’s family, which exposed him to the ways of a “cultured” family. This fresh experience enabled him to surmount the barriers to gaining equal footing in society: “We stay where the people come and defecate. We take our meals on the dunghills. And when the child who

cannot yet wipe his nose orders us to play the band, we play it… But now I can't put up with this servility and this frustrating way of life" (131). Mane was not initially aware of the importance of having a permanent place to call home — a defining characteristic of human existence. He was exposed to the harmful influence of upper-caste communities that promoted discrimination. Living in a village with a colonial lifestyle led to social and economic deprivation. Even when Laxman Mane moved out of his village, finding a rental home was a significant challenge; he had to conceal his tribal identity just to find a shelter.

Mane's lived experiences that comprised discrimination, exploitation, exclusion from society, and his resistance challenged his identity, which was in a state of flux. His efforts to resist the power structures by aligning himself with the Dalit ideology helped him to bring the attention of others to the otherwise unnoticed subaltern lives. Hegemonic power relations often lead to the humiliation and degradation of human beings, reducing them to the status of mere animals. Contrary to communal living, one of the hallmarks of tribal people, Mane spent most of his academic life away from his family. He was ashamed of his community's uncleanliness after receiving an education that made him aware of the importance of personal hygiene. However, the upper caste and their Savarna consciousness continued to relegate tribals to the margins. In the chapter *Translator's Preface and Afterword to Mahasweta Devi*, "Imaginary Maps", in *The Spivak reader: Selected works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, one finds the following memorable quote:

> A caste- Hindu, a remote outsider in a now Hindu- majority land, earns the right to assist at the laying to rest of a previous civilisation, in a rhetorical

> space that is textually separate from a frame narrative that may as well be the central narrative- of the separate agenda s of tribal and journalistic resistances to development, each aporetic to the other, the site of a dilemma. (Spivak)

Mane's community had to shift from village to village in order to seek a livelihood. After receiving education, he went away to the town, leaving behind his tribal and village life. This shift, in effect, isolated him from his family. However, this isolation turned into a force to expand his social circle. Lack of family support, social status, alienation, poverty and the absence of economic resources further accelerated his ability to overcome them. He did all the menial jobs to erase the losses from his life and preserve his cultural identity. His struggles are a testament to his resilience and his quest to break oppression and caste hierarchy, the root cause of discrimination. As an empowered man in later life, wedded to equity, Mane rejected all ideas incompatible with social justice and denigrated human dignity.

To Mane, the encounter with discrimination frames his ideas on democracy in a broader sense to deconstruct the prevailing representation of tribals through solidarity with other castes, particularly the Dalit communities. His journey was a powerful exposition of dissent against social hierarchies and the existing social fabric, in addition to being aligned towards fighting for the rights of tribal people. His consistent interaction and collaboration with Dalit intellectuals, ideologies, and organizations, such as The Dalit Youth Association, Dr Ambedkar School of Thoughts, and its esteemed members, such as Mangaonkar, Baburao Paritekar, and Nanasaheb, stem from his lived experiences. This intermingling remains a guiding

force to his identity to realise the dynamic, multifaceted power in society and contemplate his role within the larger tribal framework. Furthermore, the interviews and speeches of the social activists such as Baba Adhau and Kumar Saptarshi left a lasting impression on him.

After completing his studies, his tribal identity remained a problem. He was told by an official, "We can help you only if one of you is untouchable" (191). Mane remarks that he did not get help as he does not belong to the untouchable category. However, Ambedkar documents in *The Essential Writings of B. R. Ambedkar*, "The only way to end their social isolation is for the untouchables to establish kinship with and get themselves incorporated into another community free from the spirit of caste. The answer is quite simple, and yet not many will readily accept its validity" (230). According to Mane, the dominant community dehumanised and avoided tribals from the public space based on caste, but the government did not formally categorise them as Dalits.

Education enabled him to show more empathy for the subaltern community and to respect his cultural identity. He actively pursued employment opportunities that offered him greater dignity than menial labour might have, and in 2006, he embraced Buddhism. Mane was also drawn to social movements and politics that aimed at bringing about reform for marginalised groups, such as the tribals. The tribals were systematically denied access to virtually every social space one could think of, including the domain of education. As food is one of the most fundamental human needs, Mane highlights the image of hunger and poverty, which shaped the lived experiences of the tribal people. Kaikadi women and children resorted to

stealing and robbery to obtain food after their parents were denied access to it. Mane himself was forced to beg, and thus food forced the Kaikadi men to turn into robbery. Food is the basic right of a human being. Whenever this primary right is denied, people are forced to beg or steal which resulted in the construction of new identity in the society. Although some of them were employed, they received low wages and a low status. The words he uses throughout the autobiography, such as "hunger", "starvation", and "poverty," paint a vivid picture of the harsh realities of tribal life. In the words of G N Devy in *A Nomad Called Thief: Reflections on Adivasi Silence*:

> Colonialism has left many desirable legacies for us to negotiate. But its impact on our self-perception has been among the most disastrous of those legacies. The categories of 'caste' and 'tribe' have coloured our vision of Indian society so much that it seems unlikely that shortly, we will be able to recognise the people we call as other than "Adivasi'' (15).

Mane's retrospective narration articulates the impact of colonial legacies on tribal life.

In conclusion, grappling with one's identity is an ongoing internal conflict, especially for those striving for success within a marginalised group. Mane's language is straightforward, simple, yet deeply thought-provoking. He is frustrated with the attitudes of society and strongly criticises some of the Kaikadi tribe's practices as well. Mane refuses to accept the stereotyped identity of the tribal imposed upon him and seeks to break free from it. He aims to restructure the tribal identity that has often been homogeneously defined and enclosed within the

dominant space by drawing on his lived experiences, such as drinking water, entering upper-caste social spaces, getting an education, taking photos with an upper-caste girl, performing at upper-caste ceremonies, marrying a Maratha girl, and attending anti-caste movements. *Upara: An Outsider* remains a powerful autobiographical narrative of the tribal in this regard.

Chapter V

Lived Space and Identity Assertion in *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* and "The Adivasi Will Not Dance"

Identity formation and the space, in which one lives, are closely related, particularly regarding tribal identity. In fact, it could be argued that the members of the tribal community experienced a sense of alienation and isolation from the mainstream society largely because of the uniqueness of their lived spaces. In particular, the source of conflict lay in the very different interpretations offered up by each party with regard to the meaning of the land. To the outsiders, the tribals' land was in high demand solely for the sake of economic developmental projects. As far as Adivasis were concerned, in stark contrast, their land offered them a sense of freedom. Moreover, their experiences in their land gave them a sense of belonging, which is crucial for personal growth. Dislocation from one's native place could produce the experience of an intense existential crisis in people. This chapter analyses lived spaces and identity assertions of the Santhal community of Jharkhand through the key characters Rupi, Putki, Gurubari, and Mangal Murmu, as depicted in selected works set in Kadamdihi, Tereldihi, Nitra,Godda, and Pakur. This study shall explore how these spaces influence the formation and assertion of identity, as well as the effects of modernity and superstition in tribals' lives. The analysis is framed within the concepts of lived space and tribal identity. The second section of the chapter delves into the ways in which power relations shape and normalise the tribal way of life.

When addressing the issues of voiceless communities, tribal writers express their own subjective points of view. This allows them to bring forward their unique perspectives and shed light on otherwise unnoticed matters. It is worth noting that such a subjective voice cannot and should not be limited, as it is an essential aspect of tribal writing and an important tool for raising awareness and advocating for change. Rycroft and Dasgupta comment on *Adivasi subjectivity in The Politics of Belonging in India: Becoming Adivasi* as follows:

> The Adivasi subjectivity, therefore, gains visibility in legible ways through the idea of 'tribe' and can be woven into the dominant social, cultural and political fabric of a liberal nation. Yet, and this is a crucial concern of contemporary exponents of Adivasi identity, a significant disavowal occurs in folding the narratives of Adivasi dislocation and indigenous translocation and indigenous translation into a more singular narrative of 'tribal' belonging. (8)

Tribal narratives from Jharkhand play a significant role in framing tribal consciousness. This is substantial since it amounts to a journey, mapping, and exploration of the unexplained tribal life, healing, and reclamation. These narratives are of utmost significance, because they form an archival repository. The tribal narratives are filled with folk culture, mythology, eco-philosophy, ethnopolitics, tribal ethos, rights, sexuality, resistance, and identity. The world they envisage approaches readers' minds, compelling them to rethink tribal identity and redesign their relationship with the tribal. Tribal literature also suffers from low visibility within mainstream academia because most writings are written in tribal or regional

languages. In addition, the world transmitted through these narratives differs from the conventional worldview projected in canonical literature. However, the absence of a colonially constructed tribal figure in tribal literature, which has been reinforced as a stereotype in non-tribal literature, dissuades at least a section of the readers in the general public from seeking access to these works from the margins. Walter J Ong described the situation as follows:

> Oral cultures produce powerful and beautiful verbal performances of high artistic and human worth, which are no longer even possible once writing has taken possession of the psyche. Nevertheless, without writing, human consciousness cannot achieve its fuller potential or produce other beautiful and powerful creations. (14)

Tribal literature, by virtue of its oral transmission, tends to get confined within the tribal space. The cultural need to attain visibility and footing on par with the mainstream world resulted in the emergence of tribal writings.

In this context, the study of tribal literature from Jharkhand is of prime importance to any attempt to understand tribal identity. Shekhar's first novel *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2014) tells the story of the Santhal villages near Ghatshila. It records the story of five generations and swirls around the superstitions and beliefs of the tribal people. He analyses how these superstitions and the place of observing witchcraft are deeply intertwined in identity formation. The short story "The Adivasi Will Not Dance" is an affirmation from the Adivasi that he will not accept being a puppet of bureaucracy and power; instead, he will raise his voice for the native land.

The characters in Shekhar's literary works are placed in Ghatshila and its outskirts, the author's own native place. The surroundings, including the place of worship, the river where *dahnis* in worship their god in the nude, the homes in which they live, and the neighbourhood all play a significant role in shaping the tribal identity of the villagers. In Shekhar's works, women's roles are largely confined to the domestic sphere, in which they'd be granted limited decision-making power and lower literacy rates than men enjoyed. The issue of branding some women as witches and isolating them from society is also touched upon in his works.

In *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, Shekhar presents a narrative focused on the life of the tribals in the village rather than provide an analysis of their exploitation by the outsiders. The novel reveals how the Santhal identity comes to be formed and how deeply it remains connected to their lived space. The women of Santhali are known for their strength, beauty, and exceptional caregiving skills. Rupi was a typical bride, submissive but pretty, and belonged to the right *paaris*. Despite her inability to read any of the Roman, Devanagari, Bangla, or Ol-Chiki scripts, her virtues outweighed this minor shortcoming: "She was tall, healthy, strong-limbed, and her complexion was a little lighter than the other girls Khorda-haram had seen" (Shekhar 20). Rupi was born in Tereldihi, but marriage forced her to relocate to Kadamdihi. There, she took on a new role as the stronger woman, whereas, in Nitra, she was constantly criticised by Gurubari: "Rupi Baskey cannot believe she was once the strongest woman in Kadamdihi" (1). Rupi's upbringing in Kadamdihi and her birthplace, Tereldihi, situated on the border of West Bengal and Jharkhand, had

a major role in developing her sense of self. Tereldihi, where she lived before getting married, was a small, isolated valley that adhered to Santhali values, norms, and hierarchy. Not only did the absence of educational opportunities and exposure to diverse cultures confine her to patriarchal values, but the prevalence of superstitious beliefs in that area made it challenging for her to broaden her intellectual horizons. Kadamdihi had an atmosphere similar to Tereldihi but was more cosmopolitan and had a diverse population of different communities. However, Kadamdihi and its life reinstated what she had learned from her native village.

Tereldihi was named after the Terel or Kendu tree that grew in the area, and its leaves were used to roll *bidis*. In contrast, Kadamdihi was located near Chakuliya and was closer to other urban centres. Kadamdihi expected and demanded societal norms from the daughter-in-law. Rupi's experience in Kadamdihi was not without its challenges, as she had to navigate through superstitions, community dynamics, and strange expectations. Nonetheless, her exposure to the diverse population and urban amenities in Kadamdihi, which she considered to be far better than her native place, helped her to broaden her horizons and shape her identity.

Rupi, the woman who lived in a rural village, could create a connection with Kadamdihi, where she was warmly welcomed as a daughter-in-law. Rupi diligently fulfilled her duties as a wife and daughter-in-law during her pregnancy period, working on the farm until she delivered her baby in the field. However, when Rupi was forced to move to Nitra, a mining centre in Jharkhand known for its rapid development, she underwent a significant psychological shift. Her peaceful life was uprooted, as she found herself at the mercy of her husband and her rival Gurubari.

Rupi struggled to balance the demands of her husband and Gurubari due to the respect her husband gave Gurubari. The repressive space in Nitra was new to her, though she could not easily abandon it.

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre discusses the ways in which the acts of human reproduce meaning and new space: “In produced space, acts reproduce 'meanings' even if no 'one' gives an account of them. Repressive space wreaks repression and terror even though it may be strewn with apparent signs of the contrary (of contentment, amusement or delight)” (144). Rupi was willing to obey authority and found satisfaction in Nitra, yet the repression she faced from Gurubari created new meanings in her life. Rupi, an innocent woman, was aware that Gurubari took advantage of her naivety. However, due to her fear of losing her family and husband, Rupi chose to stay with them, even if it meant living in close proximity to Gurubari. Tussles between tradition and modernity, coupled with her aversion to causing harm to others, created great distress for Rupi. Her lack of assertiveness negated her space in the family, instead of upholding and furthering her potential to tailor her new life. However, her inability to adapt to the changing norms brought about by the industrialisation of the tribal areas made it difficult for her to follow up on her goals. The emergence of sophisticated women like Gurubari, who replaced innocent women like Rupi, contributed to her anger and frustration over her inability to keep her family together. The novel narrates her condition as follows:

> Helplessness, regret and anger race her face. Helplessness- for things are entirely out of control. Regret- at having been so careless. Anger- at herself

> and others. She hates Putki because she drinks too much and tells everyone stories about her family; she hates Gurubari and Dulari, for both know dahni-bidya. Rupi is filled with anger for everyone. She looks up at the dogor leaves and, despite herself, as if it were a crime to cry, permits the tears to roll down her cheeks. (Shekhar 8)

Rupi, despite being known as the "strongest woman", was tormented by fear and thoughts of inferiority due to her illiteracy and inability to speak any language except Santhali. This led to a subjective comparison between herself and Gurubari, causing her to develop an inferiority complex. Rupi could not escape the superstitious beliefs and black magic in Kadamdihi and Nitra. Her ailment, Sido's relation to Gurubari, and Jaipal's intimacy with Gurubari's house were all attributed to black magic by the Santhali community in Kadamdihi. Rupi's efforts would not materialise, ultimately failing to confront Gurubari as she knew she could not live in Nitra without her. Her frequent encounters with her opponent left her physically and mentally weak. Realising that her life in Nitra had transformed her from a strong woman to a weak woman, Rupi sought to establish herself within the family. However, her cultural space was limited to her home and village. The new cultural area, Nitra, had a negative impact on her life, causing mental and physical disorders as well as confusion about modern life in Nitra. Through Rupi's attempts to negotiate with the three villages, she struggled to adapt to her new role as a homemaker in Nitra. Rupi was not an earning member in Nitra as she had been in Tereldihi and Kadamdihi, where she worked in the field with her mother and mother-in-law. Nitra was a rapidly developing town with new mining factories,

customs, culture, and transportation that changed the atmosphere. The new cultural area taught Rupi to learn new things, but she struggled to adapt. Whenever she tried to escape from Nitra, she ended up returning to Kadamdihi. The layers of power imposed on Rupi's life remind her of her status in Nitra. As Lefebvre suggests in *The Production of Space*, "Power has only strategies and their complexity is proportional to power's resources. Similarly, in the case of power, signifier and signified coincide in the shape of violence" (162). The novel describes the experience of a woman who was considered an ideal daughter-in-law, wife, and earning family member in her in-law's house. However, her life changed when she moved to a new place with her husband and failed to perform her household duties. As a result, she faced neglect by making her do nothing; they assigned her the status of a patient, and she was confined to the four walls of her home, leading her to fall prey to mysterious ailments.

The Santhal community, known for valuing relationships, is depicted in the novel through the female characters decisions to prioritise their families' well-being above everything else. Gurubari, one of the female characters, is portrayed as a careful and responsible person who focuses on developing her family and children's education, in spite of the challenges. Meanwhile, Sido's illegitimate relationship with Gurubari did not spare her from the conventions of maintaining her loyalty to her husband and his family. Social consciousness is heavily influenced by the control exercised by family and community.

Santhal culture embraces this idea of familial control, which allows men to wield significant power over women's lives, particularly those of their wives.

Throughout the novel, Shekhar portrays women as being expected to handle domestic chores and perform strenuous tasks without any respite while also conforming to traditional gender roles. Rupi, the protagonist, lives in fear of Gurubari's purported witchcraft abilities and struggles with the feeling of inferiority when standing before her. Rupi retains her privileges in her native village, as well as her in-laws' village, which she holds dear; likewise, any sense of patience remains far away from her thoughts. However, her ailment stems from the subjugation in Nitra, where she must also contend with superstition and black magic. Her perceptions of self and surroundings emerge from Nitra's discursive space, in which she imagines her place based on the stories she grew up hearing. The first advice she received from Sonamuni in Kadamdihi after the wedding ran as follows: "Don't Walk through the village alone, baahu . . . And don't eat or drink anything the naikay's widow or daughter-in-law offers you" (Shekhar 75). It was typical for Rupi to hear stories about spirits from a young age. The stories she heard from Sonamuni were not new to her: "The mysterious child in the naikay's garden, Sima-Bonga, the nightly meetings of women on the bank of the Kadamdihi stream, the rolling of eyes had had some inkling of it all" (79). The advice had a negative impact on her mental state, causing her to worry even further. In the article *"*Nature as Culture: The Vision of a Tradition" from the book titled *Santhal Worldview*, Saraswati explains the concept of space as follows:

> Santhal culture sees space as simple yet profound, based on their own experiences. They believe that Maran Buru is the spirit who lived with the first Santhal. Other spirits include Pargana bonga, Sima bonga, Majhi haram,

> Orak bonga, Bir Bonga, Jaher era, and Dadi bonga, associated with regions, boundaries, villages, houses, forests, sacred groves, and springs. (4)

Rupi struggled to find an identity in Nitra because her inferiority complex dominated her thoughts. Her interactions with space remained quite inconsistent and conflicting, which further contributed to her existential crisis. Her personal experience and the absence of any ability to understand the conflict in her mind, which was also reflected in her body, further compounded the difficulties of her predicament. Because Rupi's ailment remained a mystery to society, she was excluded and segregated from family matters. Being hardworking and strong did not accord her any elevated place as a daughter-in-law in a new place. She faced significant challenges in connecting with the new region and cultural norms. Her primary focus was on superstitions, because this central aspect of her life forced her to compromise with the new ways of living, rather than assume shared notions of the community.

While her inner self did not challenge the social space of the community, it allowed her to develop a stable, sustainable, and substantial position in her husband's mind. However, her position was threatened not by outside forces but by those within her in-laws' household, particularly Sido, her husband, and Gurubari in Nitra. Gurubari gradually kept Rupi away from household work and took over her position at home. Rupi was helpless when she saw how "Gurubari would give money to Sido, and he would obediently trot off to buy groceries and vegetables for her. Gurubari and Sido would also go out on the pretext of washing rice and vegetables and spend long hours at the well" (Shekhar 110).

Rupi faced threats from within her own household and was a frequent victim of Gurubari's deceit. Rupi's liberating space was inside the home, rather than its surroundings or the public space, which put her in competition with other women. She was a modest woman who concentrated more on the spaces inside and gave great importance to her space inside the family, especially in Sido's mind. Most often, Shekhar tried to locate and assert the identity of Santhali women in their living spaces, especially in Santhali villages. Although Rupi longed for her family space, she never dared to challenge Gurubari or oppose her husband. She feared that her son, Jaipal, and husband would leave her if she rejected the presence of Gurubari in her family, as both spent a great deal of time in Gurubari's home. Liberation was not emancipation but return to her family, and her lived space. The challenges of cultural norms, personal agency and family dynamics intensified her inability to restructure her sense of self.

Rupi's lack of control over her family in Nitra was due to her non-earning status and exclusion from household work. Her opponent's eagerness to provide for the family necessitated financial resources and manpower, which further complicated Rupi's position in the family. Consequently, Rupi was advised, protected, and kept away from household work, which led to her isolation and illness. Rupi primarily wanted to lead a peaceful life with her family in Kadamdihi. She yearned for an identity as a wife, mother, and a strong woman rather than be known as a patient. Her lost identity could not be restored within the home and community. Nitra was the place where Sido worked as a teacher and Rupi had to relocate her life.

In chapter one, “Feeling at Home,” in *Home: Habitat Made Us Human* points out, “The feeling of home and the ability to experience and make use of those feelings are nurtured and absorbed in a proper developmental environment” (Allen). In Nitra, the wife assumed the task of managing the household and family affairs, while her husband Sido focused solely on teaching at the school and providing financial support through his career. Similarly, in Kadamdihi, Rupi took on even the most trivial responsibilities, such as purchasing new clothes, doing household work, and keeping family members well. Everyone demanded her help, which she enjoyed imparting to others. However, over time, the growing hostility between the brothers began to negatively affect her, as she was irritated by her brother-in-law’s behaviour. Despite this, she continued to assist her mother-in-law, Putki, by purchasing saris, petticoats, and blouses, which were crucial for her to maintain decency in the village. She also tried to teach Putki the new ideas of gentlewomanly behaviour and instil manners in her (Shekhar 122).

The limited space within the house and community further confined Rupi’s mobility, leaving her isolated from the outside world. Being illiterate, Rupi’s voice was suppressed by Gurubari, who held a privileged position as a literate and educated figure. The writer highlights Rupi’s absence as a significant loss to the family, a critical Santali community unit. The text makes clear that there were many norms in Santhal community, which tie women to the family, such that her absence in the family brought about a lack of warmth and cooperation among the other family members. In order to keep the unity and coherence in the family together and thereby abstain from crisis, women have to uphold the harmony and welfare of the

family and society. Gurubari's skills, including black magic, caused Rupi to refrain from opposing Gurubari. Instead, Rupi sought refuge in Kadamdihi to revitalise her mind and body. This incessant, long interval from Nitra resulted in lack of command over the family. Moreover, her unknown sickness hindered Rupi from carrying out her responsibilities, which further complicated her mind.

Gurubari carefully chose her words to ensnare Rupi with her sweet talk, while also asserting her authority over the family. Shekhar describes Rupi's identity as that of an innocent Santhali woman who was incapable of surviving in an educated world due to a debilitating illness, which caused her to require assistance with basic household chores. Gurubari's actions, including being seen in Rupi's husband's room, did not provoke any response from Rupi, who preferred to keep it to herself in silence and liked to offer solutions to her family members while in Kadamdihi. In Nitra, Rupi's preoccupation with her thoughts made her withdraw from society, whereas in Kadamdihi, she was free to frame her identity, which validated her place in the community. Gurubari, meanwhile, regularly monitored and advised Rupi's activities in Nitra. Gurubari often considered Jaipal as her son instead of Rupi's. Her attempts to undermine Rupi's role as a mother frequently challenged Rupi, yet she remained a strong and nurturing mother figure nonetheless: "No one questioned Rupi's abilities in Kadamdihi, either as a mother or in the fields. Only Gurubari always demonstrated that she knew more than hers" (109). Shekhar introduced Rupi as the representative of a naive Santhali woman and Gurubari as the representative of an outsider who encroached upon Rupi's world.

As the relationship between Sido and Gurubari strengthened, Rupi's alienation from the family deepened. She could not exert control over the family's affairs due to her opposition to Sido's partner. Despite not practising magic and rituals, Rupi feared them and followed others' beliefs and orders to ensure that her position, identity, and space in the family were not threatened. Rupi had vivid dreams of terrifying figures, particularly older women with white hair, especially during the evenings and at midnight. Rupi's acquaintances in Kadamdihi and Nitra shared frightening stories of witchcraft with her, leading her to believe in the truth value of myths and magic. For instance, she thought that Gurubari had used black magic to seduce Sido and that her mysterious ailment had resulted from Gurubari's tactics. Furthermore, she feared that Sido would reject her fight against Gurubari. In the article "Nature As Culture: The Vision of a Tradition" in *Santhal Worldview,* Baidyanath Saraswati observes that "Rituals are performed in the sacred grove, the sources of water, hilltops, and mountain caves. Timing for the ritual is determined by the sky, season, lunar changes, day, night, moments of natural calamity, etc. Rituals help man to experience the rhythm of life" (3).

According to Shekhar, Santhal women preferred to practice their form of magic at night.

Rupi spent most of her time in a solitary mood to fix her space in the family. Her lack of education limited her freedom and her ability to cope with her new situation; however, as a village woman, it was sufficient for her to maintain her family's harmony. All members of Sido's family and the village community admired Rupi's character and dedication, as she managed to fulfil everyone's needs.

In the chapter titled “Feeling at Home,” in *Home: How Habitat Made Us Human*, it was observed that feeling at home involves having basic needs met and having expectations, beliefs, and hopes remain powerful cognitive forces. Rupi, a woman living in a village, found herself torn between the need to adhere to patriarchal values and the desire to disobey them. Her identity was intrinsically linked to village life, where she felt free and comfortable living under patriarchal norms. Rupi was unable to adapt to the modernisation and cultural changes happening in Nitra and continued to live according to the traditional norms. This created a sense of internal conflict, leading her to become more vulnerable due to her unspoken resentment towards her husband and Gurubari.

Shekhar’s decision to take individual anecdotes from his community has greatly aided his efforts to accurately frame Santhal identity. Sketching Rupi as a remarkable specimen of woman from the Santhali community, Shekhar draws the flaws and agony of the tribal people. Her silence and inaction or noncompliance can be recognized as some of the subtle, yet effective, tools to promote individual resistance. Rupi was in search of clarity about her regional, cultural, social, and linguistic identity, largely in response to her uncertainty regarding the the use of multiple languages in the Santhal community, including Santhali, Hindi, and Bangla. Being attached to her village and having only Santhali as her language, she faced significant challenges impeding her attempts to communicate with others. The Santhal community’s regional and Adivasi consciousness dominated her thought process, leading her to seek herself as a means to form her own identity.

Self-identity can be considered inherently subjective and problematic, because it revolves around the individual's own perception. Likewise, visual and textual media are instrumental in creating and defining one's identity and relationships with others. Education plays a crucial role in shaping one's identity in this manner and helps greatly in one's efforts to negotiate with society. The illiterate Santhal individuals faced challenges in assimilating into the mainstream culture. The process of assimilation and acculturation continues to produce new Santhal identities that are continuously evolving. Without any doubt, the lived space had a vital role in moulding Rupi's identity. The Kadamdihi, Tereldihi, and Nitra had a significant impact on the Santhals who struggled to compete with modernity.

Putki, a Santali woman, is depicted by Shekhar as a bold and rebellious individual, unlike her daughter-in-law Rupi. Putki took charge of her life and livelihood, mapping her living space outside her home and in the outskirts of her village, unlike Rupi who lived as a daughter-in-law in the house. Putki's experience at the rice mill with her friend Della made her more daring, and she was never controlled by anyone. Being the only child of her father and losing her mother early in life, she explored the new spaces around her village and grew up to be a self-made woman, untied to patriarchal values. Her father and step mother deeply loved her but feared scolding her, so she grew up with considerable freedom, without many restrictions. She sought sexual freedom before marriage, and her friends encouraged her to untie patriarchal values. However, the villagers considered her immoral, and they blamed her for Rupi's ailment, along with Sido and Kanho's connection with other women. Her lifestyle moved her from the centre of the family

to a marginal space. The novel juxtaposes two female characters, Putki and Rupi Baskey, who represent conflicting values in Santhali culture. While Santhali culture places an emphasis on traditional values, Putki rejects these values in favour of modernity, as evidenced by her insistence on being addressed by her personal name rather than her family name. On the other hand, Rupi stubbornly holds onto traditional values when she is forced to confront modernity in the mining town Nitra.

The writer argues that modernity, represented by the rice mill in which Putki and her friend Della work, exploits them by making use of their labour while paying them low wages, without, however, providing sufficient guidance to them. The encounter between tradition and modernity is sketched out in the novel to show that it is exploitative and predatory by its very nature. Putki's father was the community chief and had ample vegetation. There was no need for her to contribute her wages to the family. Della, too, is a victim of witchcraft and seeks to escape from her mother's influence. It could be observed that the novel portrays not only the tension between tradition and modernity in Santhali culture but also the ways in which modernity can be exploitative. When she was young, Putki was described as follows:

> [She] was stubborn, wayward and unstoppable. Younger Somai-budhi hardly ever raised her voice, expressing herself only with her eyes, and Putki was deaf to signs and body language. Somai-haram was so immersed in religion, society, and his farm that his daughter's upbringing was hardly his concern.

> Younger Somai-budhi failed with Putki at every step and wondered why it was that she had chosen to marry Somai-haram. (Shekhar 43)

The novel's very first page features a memorable geographical depiction of Jharkhand. Shekhar succinctly captures the atmospheric vividness of the tribal area. The mining industry has transformed the agricultural systems of the tribal area. It has also led to the development of schools, railways, roads, and other infrastructural facilities. The modernization wave was embraced by Putki and Gurubari, while Rupi remained aloof from it all. Putki, a representative of courageous Santhali women, stood out for her freedom and identity, which was respected by her father and husband, despite the patriarchal norms of their society. She never negotiated with society or accepted the advice of others but found solace in *haandi*. Her wandering around the village to lament the stories of her family in her old age shows her helplessness but she never regretted her early life, for she had the freedom to make decisions.

Through Putki, Shekhar's narration depicts the fact that while Santhali women attain new spaces and economic stability, they often fail to make the best practical use of them. Putki moved to the experiences of the neighbourhood region from the home space and was not bothered by what others thought. Her sexual freedom and choices were new to Santhals, historically developed by men, but Putki showed her sexual desire and consent. In other words, Putki was framed as the agency of Santhali womanhood, as one who challenged the patriarchal power by demonstrating that men could choose not to restrict women's lives and impose domination on their freedom. Her quest in life remains a testament to courage and

freedom, demonstrating that women can break free of long-held social norms and enjoy the benefits of economic stability and sexual freedom.

While Rupi dedicated her life to the family, Putki's only concern was for her inner self. Her carefree youthful days, in which she flouted all conventions, provides a memorable testament to this attitude. However, her realisation of the problems faced by her daughter-in-law, who was cheated by her husband, led to Putki's gradual disillusionment. She started to think that she could have adhered to traditional values and norms and could have raised her sons in a morally upright way. But she did not feel comfortable advising her sons, Sido and Doso, as they did not share a close bond with her. Balancing her life in the village and at home proved to be challenging for Putki in this regard. Even though her husband, Khorda Haram, never opposed her activities, she did not feel that her home was a neutral place once her sons grew up. In her old age, Putki was often mocked by others due to her alcohol addiction and frequent complaints about family issues. Shekhar depicts Putki as a rebellious individual who had all the necessary facilities yet could not strike a balance in her life. On the other hand, men who followed, accepted, and practised the Santhali tradition were portrayed as perfect. Putki realised Rupi's helplessness, but she was unable to assist her struggling daughter-in-law. She was alleged to be a person who simply "drinks [and] throws all [her] worries to the wind [in order to] live life to the fullest." Shekhar explains further, "[W]hat the people of Kadamdihi say is true; the immortality of Putki's youth has come back to haunt her. Rupi's disease isn't hers alone. It is Putki's, Sido's, Doso's and Dulari's. It will

perhaps finish them all, their entire family" (8-9). Shekhar emphasises the Santhal community's values, which often conflicted with women's rights.

In Santhali communities, the position of the village chief was reserved for men, and even if there were a female heir, she tended to be overlooked. After her father's demise, Putki's husband assumed the position of village chief, which further reinforced the existing patriarchal hierarchy. Due to her non-conformity with regard to the dominant patriarchal values, she was excluded from the position of village chief. The author's resistance strategy with regard to superstition lies exactly in Putki's character. Her decision to refrain from superstitious beliefs reflects a deliberate action on her part to refuse Santhali practices in accord with her own will. As a working woman, Putki's experiences broadened her perspectives and motivated her to challenge the traditional Santhali beliefs. She was known to be a member of a prominent family and a person highly valued by her father. However, her involvement in an illegitimate relationship went against these perceived identities. Her father was more concerned with his social status and role as a farmer and organizer in the Marang-Buru celebration than with his family and second wife. Putki's newfound freedom outside of her village caused her to disregard her family values and relationships. Additionally, the villagers believed that those who practised black magic used Mohini medicine to attract their victims. Putki's early life in Kadamdihi and subsequent experience working at a rice mill went against the expected norms for women in her community.

It should be noted that the Adivasis' culture places a strong emphasis on community and values the opinions of fellow villagers, even if the latter are simply

gossiping. Putki, the protagonist of the story, challenged the prevailing system within the Santhali community while still maintaining her cultural identity. Shekhar portrays Gurubari, Dulari, and Majhi's wife as practitioners of black magic who exploited the tribal women's deep-rooted faith in this traditional practice. By introducing, imposing and practising black magic, Gurubari leveraged these beliefs to secure her position in the family and generate income. Interestingly, she did not resort to using any forbidden words or objects or engage in any form of acts; instead, she simply stood as a well-wisher of Rupi.

In Shekhar's novel, tribal men are portrayed as highly valued and leading respectable lives. Khorda-haram, Sido, Somai-haram, Jaipal, and Bishu are representative examples of such men who embody traditional Santali values and are familiar with the community's historical idols. Bishu and Khorda-haram are depicted as exemplary men who possess all the admirable qualities of Somai Haram, while Sido is renowned among his people as a skilled singer and respected teacher. However, the novel also highlights that some men, such as Sido, Doso, and Jaipal were entrapped by the flattering words of women. Whereas Gurubari is described as "the woman who came to her life like a friend but twined around her like the alakjari – the golden vine which latches on to the trunk of a healthy, green tree, sends its roots deep into its heart and, robbing the host of all nutrition, leaves it an empty shell" (6). Shekhar frequently uses similar images from nature to illustrate the deep connection of Santhals with the natural world.

Tribal literature often delves into the challenges faced by indigenous communities in both the external and internal aspects of their lives. These challenges

include dispossession, cultural destruction, land acquisition, sexual exploitation, and the pervasive presence of black magic. The author argues that Santhali villages are generally steeped in superstition. Sinha's article "Adivasis, Gender and the Evil Eye: The Constuction(s) of Witches in Colonial Chotanagpur" highlights witch hunting in colonial Chotanagpur in connection with gender and social tension:

> Denial of land rights, control over women's sexuality, prevalence of comprehensive taboo regimes, and absence of political representation, formed some of the many 'established traditions' in Chotanagpur. In the context of customary exclusion and discrimination, witchcraft constituted one of the limited ranges of available responses for women. It represented an act of resistance against an exploitative patriarchal structure: a fault-line along which social tensions could be articulated. (133)

These beliefs are deeply ingrained in their cultural consciousness and are unlikely to disappear anytime soon. Shekhar skilfully structures the mystery surrounding life in these villages, and the novel also touches on the subtle yet pervasive presence of caste discrimination. The overarching theme of the story is the intricate interplay between the Santhali way of life and the challenges they face. He is represented as the author's mouthpiece capable of narrating the land's history and culture. From the insider's perspective of the Santhal community, he conveys the story of the formation of the Jharkhand state, and the sociopolitical undercurrents it continues to face. He also gives his fellow beings an awareness of the importance of democracy and universal voting rights.

Khorda-haram, a simple man, believed in spreading happiness and peace among others. However, he displayed courage when talking about the community and he was known as a man of principles. His father-in-law, Somai-haram, was revered by the community even after his demise. The text reveals that Sido "was well known outside of Kadamdihi because of his grandfather and father, and also because he was educated and already a teacher" (Shekhar 18). He continues: "When Khorda-haram died, the last custodian of Kadamdihi's morality was lost. His death affected the way in which the Baha and Maak-Moray festivals were organised that year . . . In Kadamdihi, faith slipped into crisis" (158). Shekhar does not fail to express such an exemplary portrayal of Santhali men. Khorda was an attractive man with one short leg; he was described as a person who "couldn't get over his inhibitions even after drinking many glasses of haandi and paura" (67). Shekhar's male characters, including Khorda, are portrayed as the only ones aware of the history of Jharkhand and are for that reason understood to be the keepers of their tradition and culture.

The writer did not forget to provide detailed information about the political and cultural background of Jharkhand and its people and make more noticeable the achievements of the Jharkhand Party in the Ghatshila-Baharagora constituency in the 1952 and 1957 elections, which were milestones for the Santhals. The writer also cites the following story:

> Surya Singh Bersa was a famous man then, a self-appointed revolutionary. Even children knew his name. A young and charismatic Mahlay leader, Bersa was the founder of the All-Jharkhand Students' Union, more popularly

> known as AJSU. The AJSU believed that the old leaders of Jharkhand, those of the Jharkhand party, had become ineffective while the newer ones, such as Shibu Soren of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, were pandering to the demands of non-Adivasi communities such as the Kurmi, the Soondi, Muslims and others, at the cost of the interest of the Adivasis and the Jharkhand issue, to remain in a position of power. The AJSU demanded a more radical stance. According to them, Jharkhand was only for Adivasis, not for non-Adivasis. (147)

Depicting Khorda as a notable person in the history of Jharkhand politics, Shekhar unfolds the idea that men are the right people to teach Santhal history to next generation. The text also touches upon the linguistic division of India in 1956, as the leaders of West Bengal and Bihar tended to focus on mineral areas rather than linguistic boundaries. Sido's decision to bow to the Siddheshwar temple and identifying himself with the Hindu religion is a signal of Santhals' transition to a new religion: "Each time I travel to Rakha, I see others bowing their heads. So, I too got into this habit" (90). Through contact with other communities, Adivasi beliefs get engulfed in the mainstream religion, such as Hinduism, owing to factors like the perceived prestige of being associated with modernity and education.

In framing the commendable traits of the Santhal community, Shekhar describes Santhals as generous and capable of displaying courage in the face of adversity, as their unique experience as marginalized peoples enabled them to confront any challenge. He explained this through the following memorable quote: "If one were to compare Santhals and Mahatos, it would be concluded that a

Santhal, despite his riches, may die of hunger, but a Mahato, however poor, will never starve" (15). Santhals never thought of untouchability, but it was others, especially Hindus, who believed in such notions and misapplied them to the tribal peoples: "Untouchability was an issue that concerned the non-Santhals alone, so such misdemeanour could hardly be brought up before the majhi" (16). Kadamdihi is ultimately the village of Santhals and used to accommodate everyone. Khorda-haram retorted when the other caste created commotion regarding untouchability, sternly affirming: "Listen, all of you. All of you who are not a part of us, Saotal. When you all came seeking a home in this village, this village that we Saotal built, our fathers and uncles never refused you" (17). He made this long speech precisely when other people complained about the problem of untouchability.

Dreams played a vital role, in this community, because for those who had personally witnessed these dreams, the latter were always understood to hold a definite meaning. Before anything happened in the villagers' lives, they would have a dream relevant to the upcoming event, and such dreams were at the heart of Santhal identity. They located the dreams either in the natural spaces of the forest or the river. However, women did not occupy the status of being the medium of God. It was men who were supposed to have such opportunities. Furthermore, women's religious practices were considered to be a form of black magic. Shekhar commented on this belief as follows:

> Among Santhals, it is taboo for women to become the mediums. Even Jaher-Ayo, the highest female deity of the Sarna pantheon, needs a man to manifest herself. A Santhal woman who behaves in the way Rupi did at the Marwari's

> memorial can do so only because of two reasons: either a spirit or a dahni had ascended the woman, or, the woman is herself a dahni. And, as most Santhals would never believe that Rupi's body had hosted a spirit or a dahni, only one explanation would remain. Khorda-haram's elder daughter-in-law, too, had become a dahni. (172)

Even if women were capable of fulfilling the duties of the village chief or a representative of God, they would not be permitted to fill such roles, because the latter were perceived to be too "challenging" for them. Instead, women's primary responsibility was limited to caring for the family at home. Jirapara and Nitra played a crucial role in the formation of Gurubari's identity and helped her maintain her family. She was conscious enough to provide education to her daughters. Rupali, who was Rupi's daughter-in-law and hailed from a village near Jhargram in West Bengal, possessed life skills, which were similar to those of her mother-in-law; these skills helped her adapt to new surroundings and create a new home for her family.

Shekhar's characters exhibit diverse behaviours in their respective spaces. While Rupi was content with her in-laws' residence and the village of Kadamdihi, Gurubari was satisfied with Nitra and the black magic that enabled her to manage her household without disturbing her husband's relatives. Rupi grappled with social spaces as a wife, mother, and daughter-in-law, facing difficulties which she could easily overcome in Tereldihi and Kadamdihi.

It bears mentioning that cultural spaces not only foster relationships among people but also facilitate gossip. The people of Kadamdihi empathised with Rupi's condition and criticised Della, Dulari, and Damini, while mocking Putki. Romola,

who was a close companion of Rupi in Nitra, played a pivotal role in reinforcing her beliefs in black magic. The typical cultural spaces of Adivasis include their home, neighbourhood, village, and place of worship. Shekhar's characters utilise these spaces to express their emotions instead of creating new cultural spaces such as rice mills, schools, government platforms, and social forums that reflected typical colonial constructions.

The formation of identity is a continuous process that is influenced by a variety of factors, including family, society, culture, and geography. The role of space-making rituals and practices in communities, as well as the impact of geographic territory on human beings, must be taken into account. Santhals, who live in Ghatshila, a region rich in coal and migrants, are marginalised from society due to illiteracy and lack of skills. The presence of Dikus with their religion, culture, and social organisations has led to a psychological sense of inferiority. As a result, the Santhals are excluded ethnically, politically, and intellectually from the mainstream society. In Shekar's novel, female characters occupy "night spaces", which are perceived as frightening to men who are physically strong; likewise, women exploit such spaces to utilise their power. Family conflict and disagreements can have a significant impact on an individual's personality as a social being.

The immense talent possessed by the Adivasis is clearly put on display in the novel. Prominent figures like Jaipal Singh had significant political influence during the early days of post-colonial India. Their culture and identity convey diverse meanings, since being an Adivasi poses several challenges. Adivasi identities continuously oscillate between constructed and deconstructed identities, making it

difficult to establish an innocent ethnic identity without getting entangled with modernity. In *A Nomad Called Thief: Reflections on Adivasi Silence*, G. N Devy described the situation as follows:

> Between the tranquil and the mute imagery of the Indian village are those other images which portray it as an economic bulwark, a laboratory in which the Green Revolution was worked out, the arena for caste-wars, the producer of an ever-increasing population, the real political-mass balancing power structure and even merely as the latest 'market' (1).

The text's portrayal of life within the Santhali community sheds light not only on the intricate effects of modernism, but also on the disorientation of Adivasi consciousness. As a witness of Santhal life, Shekhar adeptly uses a wide range of tones, including severe criticism and empathetic concern, to underscore the seriousness of the matter. Sido's act of bowing down before a temple and his conscious attempt to disown animistic practices could be cited as such examples of modernity. As he starts to gain approval from Gurubari for everything, the frequency of his visits to his native place changes from often to rare. The township of Nitra, which Sido resides, the changes in landscape adequately document the effects of globalisation and liberalisation, such as the river drying up and leaves turning black, or the introduction of the railways. Shekhar deftly visualises this transformation in the beginning of the novel with a detailed visual map. His analysis reveals the nuanced complexities of the situation.

Santhals prefer living in isolation while maintaining mutual trust and cooperation with other communities. The novel narrates the Santhals' balanced life,

with their self-sufficient lifestyle portrayed as a response to the social realities defining their historical context, allowing them to lead an independent life and maintain a class hierarchy. Shekhar's works, such as *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* focus on the cultural space, their religion, faith, and dreams, as well as how these affect the formation of Adivasi identity; on the other hand, the chosen short story, "The Adivasi Will Not Dance," delves into the present issues faced by the Adivasi community, touching upon the power structure, democracy, bureaucracy, and the violation of human rights. The author shows on how the Adivasi community responds to these issues, with their voice being heard whenever their survival is threatened. G. N. Devy in *A Nomad Called Thief: Reflections on Adivasi Silence* also makes the posits that "the forest was gone from the consciousness of the people. 'Forest-dweller' was an unused word in the dictionary of India's culture" (4). Shekhar's representation of the Adivasi community is different from the prevalent stereotypical image of so-called "primitive peoples". He portrays the community's culture, tradition, and village life with an emphasis on the energy inherent within the community that reflects their unique Adivasi consciousness. It is worth noting that the government records have replaced the Adivasi identity with the label "tribal", subjecting them to exclusion and clubbing multiple communities and identities under one umbrella.

The assimilation process of Santhals was severely impacted by social consciousness, standardisation of social customs and rituals, and a flawed concept of development, leading to the erosion of their home and culture. According to the novelist, problems like societal exclusion, illiteracy, alcoholism, and superstition

have also contributed to systematically negating the community's values and cohesion over time.

"The Adivasi Will Not Dance" records the story, based on actual events that occurred in Jharkhand, of a Santhal protagonist named Mangal Murmu, who was unable to prevent his fellow beings from getting beaten by the police without justification. Shekhar highlights the suppression of freedom of speech and protest in contemporary India in the story. In a pathetic tone, Murmu confides that he cannot express his plan to his fellow beings:

> I only said, 'We Adivasi will not dance anymore'-what is wrong with that? We are like toys-someone presses our 'ON' button or turns a key in our backsides, and we Santhals start beating rhythms on our tamak and tumdak or start blowing tunes on our tiriyo while someone snatches away our very dancing grounds (Shekhar 170).

The lack of political representation for Santhals in the Central government has left them voiceless and unable to express their concerns about their suffering and current living conditions in Santhal Parganas. Hegemonical dominance and bureaucracy have always taken advantage of their vulnerability. Mangal Murmu's protest against the dispossession and the use of the Adivasi dance and rituals further raises the question of the significance of this tradition and the tendency for officials and the dominant class to be granted the power to dictate the terms for the other. The story highlights the untold sufferings of the Santhal community, of which even the President, who was a neighbour to the community, was unaware.

Quite similar to the other incidents, the short story unravels the lack of social respect once enjoyed in Santiniketan and from Rabindranath Tagore: “We Santhals are held in high regard in Shantiniketan. Shantiniketan is in Birbhum, and our President is also from Birbhum. He should have heard me speak, no? But he didn’t. Such a fool I am! A foolish Santhal. A foolish Adivasi” (170). As he goes on to explicate, outsiders have been the primary beneficiaries of resources in Jharkhand, leaving the Santhal community without a fair share:

> They have built big houses for themselves in town; they wear nice clothes; they send their children to good schools in faraway places; when sick, they get themselves treated by the best doctors in Ranchi, Patna, Bhagalpur, Malda, Bardhaman, Kolkata. What do we Santhals get in return? Tatters to wear. Barely enough food. Such diseases that we can’t breathe properly, we cough blood and forever remain bare bones. (172)

Sixty-year-old protagonist Mangal Murmu, in agony, states that their foolishness and innocence made them believe the others’ words at face value. Although Murmu introduces himself as a farmer and musician, he later notes that he is no longer a farmer, after having lots the ability to be one. This was because in Amrapali, the block of Pakur district had no Santhali farmlands. The whole land was occupied by the mining company and the Adivasis could not succeed in winning a fight against the mining company and bureaucrats. Their fight for their native land did not receive enough attention due to the matter surrounding the death of a Christian nun.

The media coverage of the incident involving the Christian sisters took the focus away from the reality of Santhal life. It resulted in an obliteration of their way of life in farming, as the latter was replaced by mining. The Santhals had been using their land for cultivation without damaging the natural resources over the long term, whereas Christian agencies, media, NGOs, and missionary workers rallied against them. Mining companies took over the land by killing one of the sisters, thereby imprisoning the Santhals who resisted the acquisition of their land and depriving them of their valuable resources. It is evident that outsiders with greedy intentions wanted to make a profit from the land, which was not being utilized to its full potential. Without just focusing on businessmen and bureaucracy, Shekhar points out the media's inability to comprehend the complex issue of land intrusion and its detrimental impact on the Adivasi community. Rather than prioritize critical issues like land dispossession, "No one bothered to see that our boys had been fighting for our land and our rights even before that kiristan sister came" (171). The following quote demonstrates that those who wield power virtually always expect tribal communities to passively submit to the authority imposed upon them by outsiders:

> Santhals need to stop eating cow-meat and pig-meat, that we need to stop drinking haandi. They, too, want to make us forget our Sarna religion, convert us into Safa-Hor, and swell their numbers to become more valuable votebank. In the eyes of the Hindus, we Santhals can only either be Kristian or the almost Safa-Hor. We are losing our Sarna Faith, our identities, and our roots. We are becoming people from nowhere. (173)

The issue of the gap between the Santhal people and their Christian identity remains a matter of controversy. Some converted to Christianity for the sake of financial gain, while others hoped for a better life through escaping from the caste system. Santal identity was disregarded and subsumed under the more general Hindu identity, which ignored their unique religious practices during the early post-colonial period. In contrast, Santhals believe that only those who worship and have faith in Marang Buru can call themselves Santhal. Santhals' linguistic characteristics are overshadowed by their religious and caste identities. They used unique names such as "Marang," "Grietin," and "Burulukui" to celebrate their identity, knowledge, wealth, and power. The land perspective significantly differs between Santhali and others such as Diku, Marwari, Siddhi, Mandal Bhagat, and Muslim communities. Dikus have negatively impacted Santhali villages by excavating land for stone, transforming fertile land into mines, and oppressing the Adivasi people both physically and mentally. Santhals are a group of people who have been repeatedly oppressed; however, Murmu argues that their history cannot be fully understood without acknowledging their uniqueness.

The story depicts the ways in which the Adivasi people were deprived of their land and identity by the actions of the Dikus. They were coerced into abandoning their Santhali names and adopting Western ones, despite the fact that they struggled to spell these new names or even pronounce them correctly. The Christian schools established by the missionaries aimed at increasing the Christian population and instilling the belief that Christ was the only saviour. The Adivasi people were left with no choice but to obey the Dikus, for the latter were understood

to hold all the power. This abuse can be best understood through Foucault's reinterpretation of power in his classic work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*: rather than view power as a monolithic force possessed by a dominant class, he conceptualised power as a dynamic and pervasive force that permeates social institutions. Power, in this context, was described as follows:

> [It] is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege', acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions -an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated. Furthermore, this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them. (26–7)

Foucault's concept of power as a dynamic, ever-present force, rather than a static possession, offers a valuable lens through which to examine the complex power relations at work within India's tribal communities. This perspective challenges the traditional notions of power as solely residing on the side of the dominant groups. Spotlighting the critical voices from Santhal, the narrator gamified discussions regarding the intricate ways whereby power is exercised and resisted at multiple levels, as testified particularly memorable in the following depiction: "Our men are beaten up, thrown into police lockups, into jails, for flimsy reasons, and on false charges. Our women are raped; some sell their bodies on Koyla Road. Most of us are fleeing our places of birth. How ruined we are?" (Shekhar 176) This abuse

without any repercussion for wrongdoing offers a glimpse into the nuances of power structure and the lack of recognition of Santhal identity. As a result, sexual violence and other atrocities emerge as perennial issues in Santhal life. These insidious manifestations of power dynamics inflict physical as well as psychological impact but also serve to reinforce oppressive power structures, further marginalising and disempowering the victims.

Santhali Parganas were not just a place of residence for the Adivasi people, but also served as a place in which they shared their experiences and feelings, which contributed to the development of their regional, religious, linguistic, and cultural identity. However, the Diku community took over the land and changed Adivasi life profoundly as a result. Mangal Murmu remembers how the Adivasi people were forced to abandon their religion and convert to *Safa-Hor*, a single God, single religion system. The upper-caste Hindus influenced them to forget their roots and identity, leading to the virtual destruction of Adivasi culture. The following quote from Foucault explicates this destruction of culture quite memorably:

> The chronicle of a man, the account of his life, his historiography, written as he lived out his life formed part of the rituals of his power. The disciplinary methods reversed this relation, lowered the threshold of describable individuality and made of this description a means of control and a method of domination. (191)

In Santhals life, authorities use power as a mechanism to control the tribals and submit their individual rights to surveillance in order to force the tribals to conform to the outsiders' norms. Shekhar's narrative is not personalised or tied to

any specific individual life but instead opens a discussion regarding the source of power and its far-reaching effect on the formation of ethnic identity. Individual experiences are somehow standardised, legitimised, and regulated with the advent of a new religious discourse. This involves the shift from the native ethnic concepts to standardised religious doctrines, which marks the power relation's ability to make ethnic practices all but invisible. Santhals were once a source of their own history and spirituality but later turned into the subject of a more disciplined and controlled society. This transition can be seen as a form of imposed power, in which the individual's religious identity and practices were subjected to surveillance, categorisation, and normalisation.

The article "Indigenous Identity of Tribals in Jharkhand" emphasises the following point in this regard:

> [The] integration of tribals into the caste hierarchy means a loss of their tribal identity. In a class society, they are left only as a minority group. So the pluralist – secular, democratic – socialist society is the only one that can integrate the tribal communities without they are being threatened by a loss of their identity and dignity (Shilee and Shailee 77).

Because the death of an upper caste or upper-class person is often given more importance than the death of an Adivasi, the officials and coal company owners turned a blind eye to the death of a Santhali individual. This attitude stems from the fact that Adivasi's life is not valued in society, and their deaths often go unreported, for they neither belong to the upper caste nor the upper class. By these means, the bureaucrats have permanently eradicated the Adivasi community from

the region. The Adivasis use various modes of agitation, such as stealing coal from lorries, to protest against the exploitation of women and children. The protagonist emphasises that Adivasis cannot remain calm when their peaceful existence and consciousness are threatened by others: “Our children hardly go to school. But everyone-whether they attend school or not-remains on the alert, day and night, for ways to steal coal and for ways to sell it” (Shekhar 175). He proudly remembers his great ancestors, Sido and Kanho, the notable Santhali leaders who fought against British colonialism and the Zamindari system. He swears by the need to bear the brunt of leadership in the battle against tribal dispossession and exploitation.

Cultural hegemony works within the socio-economic and ecological aspects of the community, leading to a decline in natural resources over time and various disruptions to the local ecosystem. Matiojore, the fertile land, eventually turned to coal. “The trees and shrubs in our village bear black leaves. Our ochre earth has become black. The stones, the rocks, the sand, all black. The tiles on the roofs of our huts have lost their fire-burnt red. The vines and flowers and peacocks we Santhal draw on the outer walls of our houses are black” (174). The younger generation of the village eventually had to resort to stealing coal, due to limited economic opportunities resulting from the natural destruction of their homeland. The Santhali community, known for its innocence and lack of knowledge in business and politics, was exploited by the dominant group who manipulated the tribal land for their own needs, disregarding the ecological consequences of doing so. The annual migration of Santhals to Namal and other states and districts due to poverty further accelerated the *Jolha*’s (muslim) intrusion into Santhali Parganas. They offered their services in

exchange for a share of the agricultural products, including the responsibility of looking after homes and farms. The Santhals, unaware of the exploitation and the true value of their land, were easily taken advantage of by Jolha *tolta* (village) who were more knowledgeable in these matters. The transformation of a Santhali village to Jolha *tolta* was an easy process. The speaker was portrayed wondering out loud, "Who [is] the *olposonkhyok* (outsider) . . . here?" (176) The lack of solidarity and unity amongst the Santhali people made them the object of frequent beatings and sexual exploitation by the police and the dominant class. These continuous pushes by the others into the tribals' lived space created a menace to the severe living conditions of the Santhali people, including the poverty that forced them to resort to theft and prostitution.

Likewise, Shekhar explores the present scenario of transition, conversion, and power dynamics in society. The act of stealing food or selling one's body is not a matter of choice in marginalised communities, but is instead always a result of the dire circumstances that the Santhali people are forced to endure in order to survive. Beyond land issues, the normalisation of power infects multiple levels within Santhal Parganas. The values and priorities are rearranged because of the complex interplay of power relations. As a result, marginalisation and exploitation trap Santhals in calamitous circumstances of life. Justification for these exclusions added onto the layers of stereotyping can perpetuate harmful effect on their human rights and cultural identity.

The debilitating silence caused by the absence of a strong political leader, movement, and financial resources contributed to social injustice and the loss of

possessions. Following this industrialisation, mining companies rooted in Santhal villages and economic disparity rendered the unskilled and illiterate Adivasi invisible in the economic sphere. The speaker confesses and acknowledges his inability to save the native land and tribal culture. Hunger compelled the narrator to undertake various jobs, including farming and music. Many people migrated to nearby districts for survival. However, despite losing their land and traditional skills, Adivasis had managed to preserve their unique identity through their inherent talent in various arts, which, according to Murmu, Dikus could not wipe out from the Adivasi.

The narrator reflects on how Adivasi musical instruments such as *tamak, tumdak, tiriyo,* and *banam* remain essential to their culture. Although the Diku, the non-Adivasi, had little interest in dance and music, they had facilitated money and provided opportunities to perform in formal functions as Jharkhand is known as the land of the Adivasi. The narrator recalls his younger days when he had an excellent troop and the pride, he felt in composing pieces that came to life through dance. The invasion of Adivasis' space by Dikus challenged their efforts to preserve their cultural identity through their artistic skills, despite falling prey to social and economic neglect.

The speaker observed that despite the numerous awards, recognition, and perks bestowed upon the Adivasis, these were not sufficient to guarantee them access to education or employment. In fact, tuberculosis remains a significant health concern among them even to the present time. The leaders who provided these incentives often used them to suppress the Adivasi community and establish their

projects on their land. The division of land in various districts is never for the benefit of Adivasis but always for the advantage of Dikus:

> Santhals don't understand business. We get the coal easily, yet we don't charge much for it, only enough for food, clothes and drink. But these Jolha- you call them Muslim, we, Jolha- they know the value of coal, they know the value of money. They charge the price that is best for them. And the farther coal travels from Matiajore, the higher its price becomes. (175)

The protagonist is often referred to as "Haram" within his community for his exceptional talent in music and dance. The narrator emphasises the innate ability of Adivasis, which remains unmatched even at the age of sixty. The Adivasis possess valuable expertise, which they offer for sale during the extravagant ceremonies and high-profile events organised by Diku, "As Santhals, music, dance, and songs are sacred. Poverty has forced them to sell what they hold dear. Even at high-profile functions, most people don't pay attention to their performances. However, it's deemed necessary for them to dance at events promoting Adivasi and Jharkhandi culture " (179). Adivasis' creative and agricultural skills are intertwined, as their livelihoods depend on them. Most of the members of the troupe often worked on the farm, and the members were frequently changed according to their availability. However, they could not live without their art and performances, which they became so well-known for that their performances in urban areas often earned them a decent meal in return.

Jharkhand's culture is intricately woven with that of the Adivasi, for the place is known for its art and performances. Most often, Adivasi dance was

performed in formal functions. However, the dominant people who migrated from other states claimed it as "their culture and music and dance superior to those of us Adivasi. Why don't they get their women to sing and dance in open grounds in the name of Jharkhandi culture?" (179). The story raises serious questions about the insincerity of outsiders. Despite being the state's beneficiaries, they looked at Adivasi performances as their claim to cultural superiority, tolerating it for profit and demanding it as their right. Adivasis, on the other hand, lacked the knowledge to snatch things away from others. The following contemplation of the speaker draws attention to the dire need for sustenance due to the scarcity of food: "What does a hungry man need? Food. What does a poor man need? Money. So, here I was, needing both. And recognition too. We artistes are greedy people. We are hungry for acceptance, some acknowledgement, some remembrance" (180). The tribals encounter with bureaucracy and outsider arises out of the desire for acknowledgement, recognition, and equity; coupled with their financial constraints, this compelled them to comply with the dominant authority.

In Godda district, the government asked the inhabitants of 11 villages to vacate their lands, which were primarily farmland owned by the Santhal tribe. The officials have obtained thousand acres of land from the Godda district for a 1600-megawatt project. Despite being protected under the Adivasi Tenancy Act, which safeguards the interests and rights of Adivasis, this law did not work in their favour. In the article "Land Acquisition and Dispossession: Private Coal Companies in Jharkhand", this situation was described as follows:

> The desire to preserve tribal culture partly arises from the perception that it is by circumventing traditional tribal customs and practices that celebrate community ownership and control of land, the state alienates tribals from their land. This is one of the reasons why the tribals are hanging tenaciously on to CNTA (Chhotta Nagpur Tenancy ACT in 1908) and PESA (Panchayat Extension Scheduled Areas). (Lahiri-Dutt et al. 43)

The government and the wealthy took advantage of the land to generate income for themselves. This situation amplified negligence from the governments and bureaucrats in misleading the illiterate, particularly the lower-caste Hindus, Paharis, and Santhals who led the agitations. The villagers protested against these evictions by marching to the government office, but the government assured them that their land was safe. The compulsive migration to nearby districts and states failed to help them fulfil their dream of receiving minimum-wage pay as compensation for their hard labour: "How could I manage to provide for all these people who were dependent on me now? How could the members of my troupe feed all those who had come to seek refuge in their houses? We need money" (Shekhar 182). These kinds of questions from Murmu show their helplessness, even in convening an organized strike against the dominant groups within society.

In the pursuit of progress of the dominant groups, Adivasi communities have been subjected to numerous challenges, including displacement, cultural suppression, and food insecurity. The entry of external agents under the guise of development has often led to exploitation, as was the case when Gautam Adani forcibly acquired land in the Santhal Parganas to construct his thermal plant. The

impact of this acquisition was quite devastating for the Santhali community. The speaker's statement that "his horses were far better off than all the Santhals of the whole of the Santhal Pargana" implies that Adani values the lives of animals more than those of human beings (182). Amidst this turmoil, the officials frequently visited Matiojore to ensure that he was complying with regulations, as officials secretly monitored the situation by contacting the speaker. The narrator commented, "How can all of you be so indifferent? How can you expect us to sing and dance when our families are being uprooted from their villages" (183). In the context of land acquisition by private coal companies in Jharkhand, the following was observed in the article "Land Acquisition and Dispossession: Private Coal Companies in Jharkhand":

> Mining companies know that the poor cannot have the same bargaining power; and dissuade civil society organizations from participation in PHS (Public Hearings). Those investing their capital and the communities that are mine-affected are on un- equal bargaining positions, working with biased state machinery. Although their introduction is needed, one must remember that neither the addition of Social Impact Assessment (SIA) nor continuous engagement processes can fully address the gross imbalance of power. (Lahiri-Dutt 44)

A thermal plant was set up by a wealthy individual who prioritised his own interests over the needs of the Adivasi people. Despite claiming that the entire region of Jharkhand would benefit from the plant's electricity, the rich individual collaborated with political leaders to prevent the Adivasis from accessing the power;

likewise, even the president had little interest in addressing the concerns of the Adivasis. He commented, “Yes, I was shocked. All of us were. Shocked and sad but also surprised and delighted. We couldn’t believe our luck. We had performed before ministers, chief ministers and governors. But never before the President of the country!” (Shekhar 184). The imposition of disciplinary power and surveillance mechanisms upon the tribals, often disguised as development initiatives, has had a profound impact on their communities. The authorities gradually eroded away the tribals’ autonomy in their own land, along with eroding away their cultural identity, by closely monitoring, controlling, and restricting them.

Above all, it could be said that the short story focuses on the political stand of leader on tribal land. Indeed, the following comment shows the negligence of political leaders in tribal life and their interest in repairing infrastructure to impress the President during his visit. “He did not mention how fortunate the billionaire was that he got to come to Jharkhand- a place rich with mineral deposits beneath its earth; a naïve population upon it; and a bunch of shrewd, greedy, thief leaders, officers and businessmen who ran the state and controlled its land, people and resources” (187). These socioeconomic and political acts simultaneously accelerated ongoing problems. The Dikus, in aesthetically pleasing dresses, expressed their enthusiasm towards the progress and development of Jharkhand in the inaugural ceremony. Murmu sarcastically commented on the deplorable condition of the Santhal Parganas and the lack of loyalty of others; in addition, he expressed his desire for the media to publicly expose the dire circumstances faced by Adivasi communities.

The combination of traditional clothing with modern attire indicates that the Adivasis cannot break free from the influence of modernity: "[They wore] red blouses, blue lungis and green Panchi, and huge, colourful plastic flowers in their buns. They were carrying steel lotas with flowers and leaves put inside them. All the men were wearing red football jerseys and green kacha and had tied green gamchas around their heads" (186). The Bengali President's lack of concern towards the Adivasi problems could be interpreted as a reflection of the intelligent and greedy leaders, officers, and businesspeople in control of the mineral-rich region of Jharkhand. The performances were met with derision from politicians and businesspeople, who found them tedious and uninspiring. The Adivasi people have been continuously displaced, without getting the chance to showcase their concerns about their own lived space.

Driven by a great concern for his community, Murmu points out the neglect of officials and business people by revealing that President had the power to stop the project; in addition, it was emphasized that Adani would not have come to Jharkhand to set up his thermal plant, and the Santhals would not have been displaced. These views are expressed in the text through questions such as the following: "Which great nation displaces thousands of its people from their homes and livelihoods to produce electricity for cities and factories? And jobs? What jobs? An Adivasi farmer's job is to farm" (185). Shekhar initiates a discussion about tribal issues, thereby inviting the attention of society to be focused on marginalised lives. The speaker explains the significance of cultural symbols as a powerful means of resistance, through speaking of how dance and music could be used to share

happiness in a world where struggle for existence is rampant. Mangal Murmu, a sixty-year-old Santhali farmer, utilises his cultural space in farming, song-making, and dance performances and leverages his creativity as a tool to oppose the land acquisition activities of the Adani group.

The Adivasi performers visited the ceremonial site to protest against the power plant, which they believed would destroy the community's peaceful existence. Though they took pride in singing and dancing, their unfortunate situation had forced them to abandon their ancestral land, home, and village, leaving them with no choice but to migrate, leaving them with no means to grow crops. In response, Mangal Murmu posed many questions to society: "We will sing and dance before you but tell us, do we have a reason to sing and dance? Do we have a reason to be happy? And how can we, Adivasis, dance and be happy? We will not sing and dance unless we are given back our homes and land. We Adivasis will not dance. The Adivasi will not" (187). These questions serve as an implication of resistance, as Adivasis will not sing and dance until their homes and land are returned to them. The Adivasi community's culture and identity are deeply intertwined with the land, which they inhabit. Their lived space is not just a physical location but a sacred entity with emotional and spiritual significance of its own; likewise, they cannot separate their identity from the land they occupy. In this context, dance is not just an expression of cultural diversity but a manifestation of their connection with the land and their community and the medium of resistance. The Adivasi land is known for its abundant mineral resources and fertile soil, making it an easy target for acquisition without any significant opposition. As a spokesperson of his community,

Shekar traces the journey of Adivasis from being possessors of their land to becoming disconnected from it due to development activities: “These men sitting beside you told you that this power plant will change our fortunes, but these same men have forced us out of our homes and villages. We have nowhere to go, nowhere to grow our crops” (187). Such quotes from the text reveal the current position of Santhali life after the land acquisition by bureaucracy and business people.

The Adivasi community follows the Sarna pantheon, passed down through generations. Recurrent intrusion of other religious groups compels the community members to abandon their traditional beliefs. The Adivasis’ traditional beliefs are centred around living in harmony with Nature. This belief is what sets them apart and defines their cultural identity. They have a solid attachment to their customs and rituals, which is evident in their use of Santhali names, along with the dance and music, which they perform during cultural celebrations. When their land was acquired for industrialisation, they were classified as a depressed class. This acquisition led to the perception that their land was suitable for development, an idea to which no one objected. This perception has played a significant role in shaping their identity and their relationship with their land. The invasion of the dominant culture and its cultural hegemony brought significant changes to the concept of space. New forms of colonialism perceived land as a resource for progress and profit, raising its status in the eyes of the oppressor. The idea of space was transformed from a physical entity to a tool for reshaping the tribal identity of the Santhali people, transforming them from farmers to mere entertainers for the dominant class. Various factors, such as the power structure in cultural, social,

economic, and political layers, triggered the transition of tribal life. Agencies such as the State, Central Government, media, and other entities disrupted Santhali lives rather than ensuring equity, as these “others” suppressed tribal identity and their area in pursuit of lucrative opportunities. The conflicts between the dominant and the “other” become more intricate when the unique terrain changes and the tribal identity are constantly under threat of being marginalised and misunderstood.

The land has always been a crucial space for tribal politics. For the Adivasi, reclaiming the land from the dominant power structure has long been their primary concern. It was important for ensuring their social visibility. However, the Adivasi’s body and arts are now commodified and turned into products for the government and business people’s enjoyment. Jharkhand, as a state for Adivasis, requires Adivasi songs and dances to be performed at every official function. Such acts turn living individuals into mere objects, suitable for little more than providing an image for the selfies and showpieces enjoyed by those in power. These governmental acts inadvertently recreate earlier colonial identities, where othering and objectification served to reinforce dominance. Adivasis sing and dance when happy, but the need for money has turned it into an internal force.

Through the powerful narratives contained in *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* and "The Adivasi Will Not Dance," Shekhar illuminates the profound significance of lived space for tribal communities. These spaces, imbued with nostalgia and a sense of belonging, are fundamental to the constitution of tribal identity. However, the insidious infiltration of power dynamics into cultural, social, and economic spheres threatens to erode away this identity. Shekhar's work exposes

the constructed nature of marginalised tribal identities, revealing the invisible power relations that shape these communities. By reimagining and reasserting tribal identity within their lived spaces, Shekhar offers a form of resistance. This rearticulation challenges dominant narratives and empowers tribal communities to reclaim their agency and cultural heritage, fostering a sense of resilience and self-determination as a result.

Chapter VI
Conclusion

Considering cultural space and ethnic identity in the select works of tribal writers, such as Laxman Mane, Narayan and Shekhar, it can be seen that each writer extends the nuances of this field. This concluding chapter summarises the main ideas discussed in each chapter and reinstates the argument that tribal literature distinguishes itself from other subaltern literatures. While the introductory chapter focused on the basic framework of the study, the second chapter concentrated on the history of tribal literature in general and Indian tribal literature in particular. It also detailed the basic characteristics of indigenous literature in general and how it relates to Indian tribal literature. A note on the history of Indian tribal literature envisages an interconnection between the sociopolitical and historical conditions that affected tribal lives. This chapter also discusses the most important theoretical terminologies, including lived space, lived experience, power, caste, and identity relations, which are the pillars for forming cultural space and ethnic identity.

Based on Narayan's *Kocharethi*, as well as the short story “Thenvarikka”, the third chapter seeks a nuanced exploration of tribals' complex response to modernity, especially the Mala Araya community from the western ghats of Kerala. The narrative foregrounded the initial picture of Arayar as agrarians or cultivators of traditional crops and, the subsequent compulsion to adapt to the changing economic realities. The shift from traditional crops to the introduction of cash crops marked their first engagement with the modern capitalist system. This change, however, threw them into exposure to the exploitative practices of outsiders, whereby the

merchants undervalued their products and controlled the market price. It is conspicuous from the analysis of this novel that while they underwent such exploitation, Mala Araya took various strategies to counter it. The establishment of educational institutions to equip the younger generation to cope with modern education and skills were inevitable tools to navigate and challenge the systemic inequalities and complexities that came along with modernity.

Conversion to Christianity was another strategic decision to find a space among other dominant classes. This religious conversion was a significant cultural and social shift, reflecting their desire to escape from the oppressive caste hierarchy to achieve social mobility and acceptance. Forced labour and land acquisition in the name of God and king, political manipulation, dispossession, and exploitation, despite their assimilation efforts, were common tactics employed by dominant groups to control them. While recognising the potential of education, Kochuraman, the protagonist, also became aware of its role in taking the younger generation away from their tribal identity. Araya engaged in the cultivation of cash crops in order to improve their economic conditions and seek political representation. Kochuraman utilised his knowledge of traditional medicine to access contact with various communities and gain social status in response to the challenges they faced. Narayan's *Kocharethi* delineates the complex interplay of economic, social, and political factors that shaped their Araya identity, cultural space, and experience, as well as the quest for survival and equity. In "Thenvarikka," Ayyappan represents traditional values, whereas Surendran represents the need to embrace modernity. The drastic changes caused by modernity create a sense of inescapability and

confusion for both. External forces, such as modernity and cultural shifts, compel them to adapt. The clash between ideologies and the validity of traditional and modern knowledge becomes a question in tribal life, which heavily weigh upon on their decision.

The fourth chapter pertains to Laxman Mane's autobiography, *Upara: An Outsider*, which examines the effects of lived experiences and describes the journey of an individual to break the barriers of caste hierarchy. The lived experiences he came across in various stages of his life, such as childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, from the society based on his tribal identity, highly impacted his personal and societal life. Mane's life demonstrates the power of the individual to resist and challenge the caste system, which he acquired from his early experiences of marginalisation in the village. The various events in the autobiography, such as drinking water from a tank belonging to an upper caste family, marrying an upper caste lady, pursuing formal education, and participating in the anti-caste movement can be considered as his acts of defiance, revealing his understanding of the caste-based social structures of society. These resistant activities enabled him to address the issue and later solidify his position as a social reformer. His autobiography reveals how he could successfully challenge caste-based discrimination by attending the school which denied his entry into education, performing at weddings, and participating in cultural events and festivals. Hence, his narrative and journey are testimonials of the tribal identity inching closer to social justice and empowerment, and they underscore the potential of an individual agency to shape broader social changes.

The fifth chapter identifies the tribal identity of the Santhal community in Jharkhand, as well as its interconnection with rapid sociocultural changes, as portrayed in Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's literary works *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* and the short story “The Adivasi Will Not Dance”. Santhals are shown to have a profound connection to their ancestral lands. Rupi, the protagonist in the novel, finds her identity and roots in her villages, particularly Tereldihi, Kadamdihi, and Nitra. The writer narrates the traditional gender roles within the Santhal community, in which women were expected to uphold moral values and adhere to the domestic duties expected by the patriarchal society. More than that, women were considered to be the advocates of superstitious belief and the evil practices of black magic. Men, on the other hand, were portrayed as the spiritual mediators and the custodians of traditional values and culture. Rupi Baskey, the protagonist in the novel, is an example of the disorientation experienced by tribals when confronted with rapid modernisation. The disruption of her familiar environment, the erosion of traditional values, and the complex interplay between superstition and modernity resulted in her physical and psychological ailment. The tranquillity of agrarian village life in Tereldihi and Kadamdihi and the unrest of the urbanised, industrialised landscape of Nitra underscore the challenges in adapting to external pressures that put the tribal communities in more dangerous situations. In the short story “The Adivasi Will Not Dance”, the writer articulates Santhal's collective resistance against land dispossession and cultural assimilation. The cultural expressions of Santhals such as dance and music emerge as a powerful tool to voice their protest and assert tribal identity. Santhal demonstrates their resilience and agency in the face of dispossession of their land by refusing to surrender to

bureaucracy and power and engaging in strategic silence. Shekhar contributes a broader discourse on tribal rights and the need for cultural preservation by examining the impact of modernization and governmental policies on tribal land and life.

The three writers, Laxman Mane, Narayan and Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar offer compelling narratives of the lived experiences of the tribal with the authenticity and immediacy of an insider's perspective. Such narratives bring to light the systemic violations of tribal rights and the exploitation of tribal peoples through the ages, precipitated by their cultural differences and their isolation from other communities. The characters are often seen as the signifiers of victimisation, cultural erosion, and displacement. They are subject to the whims of bureaucracy, landlords, dominant communities, and religious leaders, who seek to gain control of the resources in tribal land. The narratives disclose the realities and recurrent interference of others in tribal life, which often challenge individuals in navigating a hostile society to live up to their tribal aspirations and practices.

The representation of tribal identity and their cultural resistance form the twin foci of these writings. From their pre-colonial existence to post-colonial struggles, history has always misrepresented the tribal. It was argued that indigenous cultural practices are lost from the tribal repository, practices including rituals, unique languages, art forms, and traditional knowledge regarding agriculture and medicine. Formal education, performance in ceremonies, and active participation in anti-caste movements as a form of resistance have enabled the tribal to enter social space. In his work, Shekhar articulates the means through which the Santhals

maintain their tribal identity and resist oppression. Santhals use their art forms to resist land acquisition, land dispossessions, bureaucracies and business people's need to establish thermal plants and religious conversion. Narayan goes on to say that education is one of the tools used to defy the cultural hegemony imposed by the mainstream society. According to Shekhar, Santhals protest against religious conversion, whereas Narayan comments that the Araya embraced Christianity to defend themselves from marginalization based on caste. Sido's decision to worship of Hindu gods, instead of practising Santhal rituals, is similar to the way that Arayar, Narayan's characters, worship the Christian gods and gives their children Christian and Hindu names. Narayan and Shekhar examine life in their respective regions and comment that modernity has highly affected tribal life in the form of displacement and dispossession. Narayan reveals that dominant communities trampled the forest, and the crops of Arayar in the name of development, God, and King. Murmu, the speaker in the short story, "The Adivasi Will Not Dance", delineates the ways, in which mining on tribal land not only causes Nature to turn barren but also severely affects the livelihoods of the tribal. Rupi, in *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, becomes mentally disoriented because of Nitra's industrialisation and cultural change. Shekhar observes that Putki led an immoral life because of cultural erosion, which is the effect of modernity and worked in the rice mill and spent her income on buying products as a part of consumerism.

The adherence to indigenous practices is an important means of reinforcing the receding tribal identity. Even though tribal life is marked by different forms of exploitation, there seems to be some degree of consensus among select writers.

These three tribal writers agree that tribal communities adapt to the changing circumstances while preserving their cultural heritage. Mane remarks that his father practised the rituals of his community, and his relatives respected and revered him as the representative of gods. He practised and performed the dance and music of the Kaikadi community in upper-caste ceremonies. Narayan's protagonist Kochuraman, along with his father-in-law Ittyadi, worshipped their gods and practised rituals such as *Orukkal* during harvest. Shekhar's characters, such as Khorda Haram, Putki's father, and Sido, also represent their respective cultural traditions. The author potrays men as figures suitable to uphold their heritage. Moving from the novel to the short story "The Adivasi Will Not Dance", Mangal Murmu is visualised as a farmer and performer who carries Santhal's innate talent in the arts. Though all these characters stand for their own cultural heritages, they show their ability to adapt to the changing atmosphere of modernity. For example, Kochuraman, the traditional *Vaidyar*, establishes *pallikoodam* and invites Aasan to give formal education to Araya children, as well as encouraging his people to enter into the cultivation of cash crops. Mangal Murmu accepts the government's invitation to perform before the president, not just for money but also in order to protest. Putki explores her freedom when she gets a job in a rice mill. Sido keeps his manners sound, as expected from a modern teacher. Laxman Mane's father quickly understands the need for formal education. When he faced exploitation in the name of caste, he compelled his son to go to school. From analysing the texts, it can be assumed that the three writers substantiate the idea that tribes are a part of the changing circumstances, though they try to uphold their cultural heritage.

No study of tribal identity could be complete without understanding gender roles and gender-related expectations within the community circle. In the select narratives, women are expected to fulfil their roles to satisfy the patriarchal society. However, the tribal writers are keen to mould their female protagonists within a nuanced characterisation. Though they are expected to follow the values of their community, women are depicted as strong and bold enough to question the authority of society regarding individual freedom and rights. In Mane's autobiography, his mother, aunt, and other female characters are physically strong enough to do the same jobs as men. They work hard inside and outside the home to fulfil the expectations of the family. Kocharethi, the eponymous character of Narayan's novel, was keen on domestic work, as she helped her man in agriculture and spent money carefully, even becoming ready to bargain with merchants to buy and sell products. Narayan does not forget to mention the matrilineal system among the Mala Arayas, in which the ownership rights of the house and property go to the daughters-in-law of the family. Rupi, known as the strongest woman in her village, is the embodiment of Santhal femininity. She is hailed for her physical strength, in that she did the work of three men taken together. The fact that she satisfied every domestic need without any complaint makes her the ideal Santhali woman, whose value lies in this ritualistic domestic performance. This is given a stark contrast in the character of Putki, her mother-in-law, who is picturised as a rebel against the traditional notions of Santhali womanhood. Putki is also celebrated as a figure who defied the expectations of the community to attain economic freedom and enjoy life in her youth. By presenting the conflicting portrayal of womanhood, Shekhar demonstrates that Santhali women cannot be reduced to a homogenous lot, for all their subtleties.

The experiences, challenges, and opportunities faced by women in tribal communities are very complex and multifaceted. The women in Mane's autobiography face domestic violence, as seen in the cases of his mother and aunt getting beaten by his father and uncle, respectively. Added to this miserable plight, there is the issue of bodily autonomy, in which such people would not even be allowed to clean their bodies due to the fear of sexual abuse by upper-caste men. This is the same reason why women are kept away from participating in rituals that take place at night away from home in the forest; in addition, such women worked more than men did to look after their families, because most of the men were drunkards. However, there are a few details regarding the educational opportunities for girls in tribal families provided in Mane's autobiography. His wife was a Maratha woman who had formal education, which enabled her to question social inequalities and the caste hierarchy. Narayan's women characters are victims of land exploitation. Though the narrative gives importance to the community rather than individual life, Kocharethi can be evaluated as an individual who stands behind the shadow of Kochuraman. However, she represents the Araya woman who courageously chose her partner and had excellent skills in agriculture. She was the victim of land exploitation and faced financial crisis when her husband was admitted to the hospital and was forced to mortgage their land for the treatment. Shekhar's short story also throws light on the victimisation of women in the name of land. Many women lost their homes and faced sexual exploitation and denial of education.

Shekhar's Gurubari and Narayan's Parvathi, Kocharethi's daughter, are the symbols of tribal women who had the opportunity to obtain formal education.

Hence, they are self-made women who designed their own lives. In contrast, Gurubari, Rupi was innocent, illiterate, and largely unaware of the cultural change in Nitra. Shekhar demarcates between Santhal women living in remote villages and towns in terms of education; while the former did not have the same access to formal schooling, the latter gained a primary education. However, both Narayan and Shekhar admit that modern education takes them away from their indigenous culture. Rupi was illiterate but innocent, in contrast with Gurubari, who was selfish. Parvathi kept aloof from her culture after acquiring education. Rupi's innocence, later, comes to affect her life when she moves to Nitra with her husband. In the narratives taken for study, Mane's wife, Narayan's Parvathi, and Shekhar's Putki stand as the symbols of the empowered female. Though Mane's wife was not from a tribal community, she was the only female character who boldly questioned the caste hierarchy, violence against women, and patriarchal values. She did many odd jobs and never complained to herself or her husband about her miserable life for choosing her own path, such as marrying a man from the tribal community. Whereas his mother, aunt, and other female characters in the autobiography never question their men or never would like to violate societal orders but silently accept the atrocities and injustice.

In the background of Kerala, Kocharethi is portrayed as both a bold and an efficient woman. Her daughter Parvathi too questions societal norms and asserts her right to study. She is conscious of the importance of conducting herself by dressing reasonably when she became a government employee. Coming to the land of the tribal, Jharkhand, Shekhar develops his narrative, titled *The Mysterious Ailment of*

Rupi Baskey, centring on female characters, such as Putki and Rupi. He narrates the story of five generations and explores the cadences of their lived spaces, Tereldihi, Kadamdihi, and Nitra near Ghatshila, thereby providing an overview of the Santhal community. The constant tension between the individual woman and the community is shown by the ways in which Putki led her life fighting with Santhal's norms. She was always under the strict scrutiny of villagers but was never bothered by their scathing criticisms. Villagers stand as the authority to interfere with others' lives. Putki did not look after her kids, contrary to the expected roles of a mother, wife, and daughter, nor did she wait upon the concerns of her father and husband. She never used her family name “Baskey” with her, as her daughter-in-law, and was an advocate for individual freedom rather than believe in superstitions. In these ways, Putki traversed many an untreaded path. It can be seen that though some of the women characters are depicted as weak and vulnerable, some others are shown to be empowered and certain of themselves.

Writers find tribal literature as a tool for effective cultural preservation and resistance. With its aim of raising consciousness, tribal writing provides a platform for the marginalised voice; in this way, such writing challenges dominant narratives by dismantling misrepresentations through sharing tribal people’s own experiences and perspectives. By means of the hitherto unknown stories of the community, such writings articulate the unrecorded history of their community. These narratives invite attention to issues such as environmental degradation, displacement, and discrimination. Though the narratives are penned by male writers, they have a significant impact on social and political scenarios, especially in their

problematisation of the tribal self with respect to gender roles, settler intrusion, and indigenous values. Writers use their literary space as a replica of their lived space in order to record their resistance. These writers have chosen their style as a medium to convey their experiences and perspectives. They use simple but powerful words, which are straightforward in narration; devoid of connotative meanings, these words capture the contemporary tribal experience. If Mane narrates tribal life under the purview of caste, Shekhar and Narayan visualise the interplay between tradition and modernity, as well as trace the impact of social and political negligence in Adivasi lives. Rather than focus on individual stories, they narrate the story of the community. They also negotiate their collective identity and status in relation to other subaltern communities. Mane's observation is often sharp but analytical, questioning the society. Narayan takes a critical stance on the Mala Araya community by problematizing their cultural expression and transitions. Though written in English, Shekhar's novel *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, uses words from Santhali, Hindi, and Bengali, in order to show Santhals' assimilation into the larger cultural discourse in the border regions of Jharkhand, Bihar, and West Bengal. Each chapter of the novel begins in italics and contains a brief summary of the main idea.

The writers do not merely invite a sympathetic attitude from others; instead, they critically narrate life in their respective communities and accentuate the implication of the tribal self in the face of assimilation. Apart from unravelling cultural uniqueness, tribal literature demands a more inclusive and diverse literary canon by adding their experiences to the Indian literary landscape. They articulate

their struggles over the dispossessed land and social space. The intensity of the experiences, the ways of marginality, the issues lying behind their discrimination, and the style of writing all make tribal literature different from other genres of literature. Hence, their narratives can be considered to be a new literary tradition. It is not just limited in cultural and oral tradition but also opens up new discussions on systemic injustice and tribal people's connection to their ancestral land and community through negotiating the ways in which they get placed among the dominant social structure.

The constant interplay among lived experience, lived space, caste, and power serve as a defining factor of cultural space and the sense of identity, which distinguishes tribal literature from other literary disciplines. Lived experience enables the characters to realise their social condition and to question their exploitation. The narratives explore lived experience as knowledge of themselves and their community, as well as sources of unwritten history, especially those of tribal communities. Though the authors write about personal, subjective experiences from the familiar environment, they open a social and cultural interaction within the historical context. In addition to this, lived experiences reshape the cultural and social norms and initiate social mobility. This accelerates the transition of traditional values and creates a new space, which can be more inclusive. In these writings, lived experience contributes to the indigenous knowledge tradition, while education is something that is externally acquired as part of embracing modernity. Thus, education emerges as a critical but powerful and ambiguous force that carries the risk of alienation from one's ethnic roots.

In *Kocharethi*, there is a memorable portrayal of the Mala Araya's experience in their native land in the Western Ghats of Kerala, including their struggles to battle wild animals, weather conditions, and the exploitation from Christian and Muslim merchants. In "Thenvarikka", Ayyappan's lived experiences encourage him to understand the environment, which helps him develop his identity by considering the importance of nature. He believes that tribal life is insecure without Nature and will end in natural disaster. Surendran, the representative of the young generation, gives more importance to material life than to Nature. He considers the previous generation's attachment to Nature to be an outdated notion. In the case of Shekhar's works, Rupi's lived experiences create disorientation because of the conflict between tradition and modernity, whereas those of Murmu show that Santhals were in a transitional state with the advent of modernity and mining companies. Santhals were forced to convert to Christianity and remove Sarna religion from their lives. The lived experiences include their assimilation into a new faith, the loss of their unique tribal names through the adoption of new Christian names, the reduction of their native place to the status of black dust and barren land, and the conditions of dire poverty which forced them to resort to crimes like stealing coal. If Mala Araya were eager to embrace Christianity to remove caste identity and discrimination, the Santhals were forced to do that by the missionaries. In the authors' view, lived space becomes more than an instrument to develop perception and self; it is a space which allows them to think and resist those bitter experiences.

Lived experience is connected to lived space. Rather than be a site or a geographical location that produces cultural norms and practices, lived space is

where people shed and exchange their emotions, and it is a place where they align themselves with others. Hence, it acts as a base to form cultural identity and cohesion. The loss of these places because of displacement and dispossession disrupts the connection to their roots. Lived space is not just a physical, social, and emotional space but also shapes everyday reality and creates personal histories, which turn out to be a larger societal force. The writers communicate the tension between tradition and modernity, the conflicting values, and their unique cultural heritage. It acts as a potential avenue for social mobility and a testament to their entry into social space.

In Shekhar's narratives, the characters progress from passive resistance to active protests and exhibit remarkable resilience and agency to protest against the acquisition of their lived space. In contrast, Narayan explores how Araya make use of their deep knowledge in traditional medicine and martial arts to retrieve their land. Ayyappan in “Thenvarikka” is deeply connected with his lived space, which he believes to be his identity and root. Surendran, on the other hand, perceives land as nothing more than a profit-making space, and he feels that there is no need to form a spiritual bond with nature. In the case of Mane, his experiences enable him to develop a new perspective on ethnic life, including social exclusion from public spaces, stereotyping as a criminal, lack of access to rented houses, limited possibilities to get jobs, denial of rights to live among other communities, and having to remain in segregated areas reserved for subaltern communities. Mane’s interaction with the everyday social space shows that although it created insecurity, it was, at the same time, a learning platform to mould his identity as a social activist.

Each experience in the lived space was a journey that enabled him to understand other subaltern people. In the lived space, tribals undergo continuous, restless, and egregious violations of their human rights. Those spaces cannot be viewed as physical but the experience they receive, affects their emotional space and shapes their self. This is why Rupi's condition is misunderstood as a mystery by medical practitioners, astrologers, and her community at large, even as her body reflects the trauma of modernity.

Caste is a decisive tool which defines social hierarchy, status, and the source of power. It restricts mobility and opportunity for the subaltern, especially the tribal. Laxman Mane depicts himself as the real victim of the impact of the caste-conscious Indian society. He had gone through systemic humiliation, based on his identity in the criminal tribe, which acts as an agent in the formation of his identity. Caste identity primarily pulled him away from the privileges enjoyed by the upper caste. He had to face denial of opportunities, low wages, and discrimination, which pushed him into invisibility. Mane's autobiography sketches the various experiences, in which he was evaluated on the basis of his caste identity. His childhood experiences enabled him to understand the division of human beings based on the varna system, such as upper caste children throwing stones at his family, teasing him at school, and preventing him from sitting with them. The upper castes use caste as an instrument to tame and develop subaltern identity. Practices like the inspection in Mane's and his family members' body and belongings by the villagers when they decided to shift to another village point to the marginalisation and stigmatisation of the tribal body. Furthermore, people used humiliating words and his caste name to address

him, which further added to his sense of insecurity. Subaltern life remains under the constant gaze of the upper caste, such that only the upper castes have the right to decide where one should live or what kind of name or address one should carry. Just a few incidents in Mane's life demonstrating his need to confront the harsh realities of exploitation include the following: not being allowed to take drinking water or sit beside an upper caste girl for a class photograph, being forced to steal tapioca during lunch time to avoid hunger, having to beg for food or eat stale food, and struggling to find a rented house and a job after marriage. In its cumulative effect, his very existence is rendered invisible by these attempts to silence and dehumanise him.

Caste identity is one of the main reasons behind Mala Araya's conversion to Christianity. The narration of stories from Indian epics has left the Araya confused regarding their religious identity; they did not know whether they were featured inside or outside of Hinduism, though the upper caste tried to connect them to the Hindu religion. Yet, they were considered to occupy the lowest rung of the religious hierarchy. However, it can be seen that Mala Araya had not faced as much untouchability as the Kaikadi tribe, Laxman Mane's community. Arayar had permission to enter upper caste houses and drink water; in addition, they were provided food, while Mane's community were denied all of the above. Shekhar's works show how the Santhal parganas, once the exclusive indigenous lived spaces, lost their uniqueness as a result of intrusive activities like mining and the establishment of thermal power plants. Caste is a factor, which determines one's identity and intensifies oppression according to the position of one's caste in the

varna system. The lived experience of the characters with respect to their caste defines their status as invisible or as the other.

Tribal men and women are portrayed as the victims of the power structure in the society. The dominant communities reinforce their norms, values, and laws and design one's status. The social structure based on caste and power has a significant role in determining what constitutes the lived experiences. Those who are socially and economically in a marginal position have to face violence, exclusion from certain spaces, and discrimination. Mane and his family did not have the privilege to enter all public spaces in the village. Those who had power wielded the social, political, and economic spheres completely under their control. This created imbalance and those imbalances in the social hierarchy, in turn, got legitimised. The communities described in Mane's narratives were denied enough wages and this economic exploitation led to their impoverishment. Stale food and torn dress were usual among tribal communities, as their poverty can be seen as the product of caste and power in society. Mane's narrative throws light on the scarcity of food in subaltern life. Not only in childhood but even in adulthood, he had to wait for food offered by his neighbours. The denial of the right to make use of natural resources, the right to claim enough wages, the right to claim enough price for their products, and the right to live in a particular place often affects the development of self-perception of the tribal. Lack of access to the social, economic and political levels of representation was linked to the mainstream ideology that undervalued tribal subjects and taught them that their culture is inferior or irrelevant. However, to resist those power systems, Mane and his father used their skills in arts, which were

inevitable in the rituals and ceremonies of the upper caste people. Mane uses education as an instrument to redefine tribal identity, to get a job, to reduce poverty, and to achieve social status.

Mala Araya were in a miserable plight because of bad weather conditions and the intermittent attacks of wild animals; in addition, they were also illiterate. Merchants' migration to the Western Ghats was frequent and their supremacy over the land literally had thrown the Araya in misery. Their identification of this external intrusion is what makes them enter into the cultivation of cash crops: a desperate effort or "the last straw" to stabilise their economic means and, more importantly, to ensure their presence in society. Their entry into formal education supplemented their effort to cope with their new surroundings. Merchants did not entertain the Araya visits to the market. Instead, they climbed the hills during the season of harvesting spices and other crops to make a contract with the Araya to sell the products in the form of a barter system and thus prohibit them from visiting the market, keeping the Araya ignorant of the actual price of their products. In addition to this, bureaucracy tried to enslave the tribal in alcoholism and use his manpower to increase their infrastructure in tribal lands. Their ideologies were finetuned to accentuate the subaltern position of the Araya justified their actions. "The Adivasi Will Not Dance" articulates the Santhals' efforts for representation in the society, when bureaucracy joined hands with businesspeople to normalise and maintain the everyday life of the tribal. The changes in tribal life are due to cultural transformation, which is the product of a society where ideologies of power operate. The socioeconomic changes heralded since the adoption of modernity have

unbridled the powers of outsiders. This led to the erasure of old crops, as the desire for economic stability resulted in seeking new crops instead of old ones.

The characters in the select narratives do not present themselves as vulnerable when they are pushed to marginal spaces. Instead, they utilise those spaces to adapt to modernity, to resist oppression, and to develop their identity. Rather than stand as passive, they show their ability as an active contributor to the ethnic capital in society. Those sites turned out to be a space, in which to test their strength and prove their mettle. Likewise, marginality or marginal spaces can be considered to channelise vulnerabilities into strengths in order to reclaim one's rights.

Cultural space is a space where language, rituals, art, social customs, practices, and expressions intertwine intricately to create a sense of belonging. It is a site for negotiation and expression of identity. Rising beyond its geographical or territorial limits, it is a space where mutual perception of cultures actively take place. The tribals assert their identity through cultural expressions. This space reinforces or challenges societal power and has a holistic connection to other concepts, such as lived experience, lived space, caste, and power, which interact as in a cycle. Caste and power influence the lived experience and lived space; the assertion of identity takes place in this cultural space. Power designs not only the status of a human being but also gives the ability to control and access resources. Therefore, cultural space serves as a key to ethnic identity. Through the lens of tribal perspectives, the tribal writers connect tribes to the land and their internal bonds with other communities. From analysing those narratives, the significant

characteristics of tribal literature are such that they celebrate tribal life, as well as their relation to their lived spaces. Their interaction with mainstream society is defined by the ways in which they use their language and their skills in arts as a weapon to invite discussion on the tribal culture and identity.

Chapter VII

Recommendations

The thesis, entitled *Cultural Space and Ethnic Identity in Indian Tribal Literature: A Study of Mane, Narayan, and Shekhar*, deals with one autobiography, two novels, and a short story. The study brings out various issues faced by tribals, as penned by Laxman Mane, writer and social activist from Maharashtra; Narayan, author cum government employee in the postal service from the Western Ghats of Kerala; and Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, doctor and writer from Jharkhand. While different identities such as marginal identity, cultural identity, and individual identity come under the purview of the study, the important issue of the tribal revolutions in Maharashtra, Kerala, and Jharkhand and its impact on tribal life is not spelled out in detail in any of the works. The focus on the intersections of cultural space and ethnic identity in the select works constrains its scope. The work did not probe into the details of the complexities of identity crises and the impact of globalisation and neoliberal policies. Moreover, the present study can be narrowed down, primarily within the context of lived space, lived experience, power, caste, and identity relations. While they provide valuable insight into tribal lives, these concepts limited the study from exploring other relevant factors. The study was selective within the framework of spatial studies; subaltern studies and indigenous studies acknowledged the inherent boundaries of the research and suggested avenues for future exploration. The thesis also does not focus on other works written by these writers. Moreover, most of the prominent writers in tribal literature write in the regional language or the author's mother tongue, and the heterogeneity in each region has to be addressed in

order for one to know more deeply about tribal identity, though this had been left out. Without the study of tribal writings from the Northeast, the study of tribal literature could not be complete. However, the thesis acknowledges its gap in leaving out the selection of tribal literature from the Northeast. The present study limits the thesis to its basic premise. In the same way, the study leaves out the scope for a detailed analysis of regionalism in tribal literature and its various implications incorporating theoretical terms about the area. The growing attention to multiple pieces of literature in the academic world upholds the scope of the analysis of the nuances of this literature. This study closes by addressing the need for social justice and representation.

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