

*Adivasis and the Myth of Independence:  
Mahasweta Devi's  
"Douloti the Bountiful"*

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For half a century or more, we have struggled for freedom and ultimately achieved it. That struggle, apart from anything else, was a great liberating force. It raised us above ourselves, it improved us and hid for the moment some of our weaknesses. We must remember that this experience of hundreds of millions of Indian people was not shared by the tribal folk.

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU, *The Tribal People of India*

In these thirty-one years after independence I have not seen our people attaining true independence in anything—in food, water, land, loan or bonded labour. A pure, white and sunlike rage against the system which has made this independence impossible is the inspiration behind all my work. I believe that all parties, right or left, have failed to keep their promises to the common people. I have no hopes of this conviction being shaken during my lifetime. Thus I have written only about humanity to the best of my ability so that I do not have to feel ashamed to face myself.

MAHASWETA DEVI, *Agnigarva*

**I**N SALMAN RUSHDIE'S novel on Indian independence, *Midnight's Children*, the birth of a new Indian nation is presented as a fictional construct whose meaning varies according to the subject position of the character. In the words of the protagonist Saleem: "There are as many versions of India as Indians" (323). As the narrator of Rushdie's epic novel, he refers to the independent India as "the new myth," "a collective fiction," "a man made fantasy," "a dream," "a fable"—all expressions that emphasize its discursive nature. *Midnight's Children* participates in the proliferation of myths of independent India, while simultaneously exposing their fictionality and occasionally challenging their

truth-value. For instance, it asks, what does independence mean for the fisherwomen of Koli, the tribals in the hills, and the bonded-labourers in the fields? Saleem and Rushdie suggest that despite political independence social inequalities persist; the landlords, the moneylenders, the tax collectors continue to exploit the poor, the peasants, the landless agricultural labourers.

These landowners, moneylenders, and tax collectors, along with the new elite of English-educated businessmen from Delhi, Bombay, and Calcutta, are the ones who benefit from independence, who inherit commerce, power, and money from the departing British. Rushdie's novel closes with the prospective of the celebration of Independence Day just after Indira Gandhi's two-year suspension of democracy,<sup>1</sup> and Saleem cynically comments, "although I can smell other more tarnished perfumes: disillusion, venality, cynicism . . . the nearly-thirty-one-year-old myth of freedom is no longer what it was. New myths are needed; but that is none of my business" (546).

The Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi has also questioned the "myth of independence" in her fiction. She has been writing about the dispossessed people of India for fifty years.<sup>2</sup> Her stories describe the lives of the tribals, the dalits (untouchables), the low castes, the peasants, the bonded-slaves. And, in the process, they question mainstream history by presenting "the people's version of history" ("Untapped Resources" 15) and expose to scrutiny the freedom and equality promised with political independence. Moreover, she goes one step further than Rushdie. Rather than saying that the myth no longer exists, Mahasweta Devi eloquently points out that it never was for a significant group of people in India: the poor, the dispossessed, the tribals.

Devi's representation of the indigenous peoples of India is exceptional in many ways. There are few writers who have chosen as subject of their work the tribals, and fewer still who have written about them with her knowledge and sensitivity. Although not a tribal herself—she was born in a middle-class, upper-caste family in Dhaka—Devi writes with extreme empathy and no romanticizing about the tribals, their way of life, and their exploitation. Her language, from what we see in Gayatri Spivak's authorized translation, is simple, direct, entirely devoid of senti-

mentality. And her stories are often presented through the eyes of a tribal. In other words, contrary to the representation of tribals in colonial writer Kipling ("Lispeth") or in contemporary novelist Arjun Joshi (*The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*) as foreign, alien, primitive, other, she offers an insider's perspective where the other is the non-tribal, often ignorant of the tribals and their world, insensitive and exploitative:

Not only do I use dialects, I also use words from the "living language" whenever necessary. In writing about the tribals, I sometimes use tribal words. But most of the time I follow the way they speak and express their thoughts. The literate tribals read my books and find them convincing. (19)

These comments reveal her attempt at representing the tribals as truthfully as possible for an audience composed of tribals, who will read her stories as written accounts of their "history," and of non-tribals, who will discover the world of tribals. Sitakant Mahapatra, who has edited, translated and introduced eight anthologies of tribal poetry, observes that the "Indian primitive tribes' world is immensely alien, not merely to the western world but even to the urban elite in India" (33). Devi's story, "Douloti the Bountiful," published in a collection of three stories entitled *Imaginary Maps*, serves both as a doorway to the history and present situation of the tribals of North-East India and as a lens to focus the image on the accomplishments of Independence, fifty years later.

The people referred to as the tribals, or the *adivasis* as some prefer to call themselves (*adi*=oldest, *vasi*=inhabitant), are considered to be the indigenous or original inhabitants of India, that is to say, they lived on the land before the invasion of the Aryans, roughly 1500 BC. An extremely heterogenous population of 70 million people (67 million in 1991 census), they are dispersed among approximately 420 different tribes living across India, belonging to different cultures, speaking various languages and dialects, engaging in diverse occupations (hunting, food-gathering, settled cultivation, bee keeping, unskilled labour), experiencing varying degrees of assimilation and acculturation.<sup>3</sup> However, they share a tradition of strong attachment to land and forest, from which they derive both their livelihood and their

identity, and a long and painful history of disenfranchisement and exploitation:

Who reckons how long the Crook Nagesias have been their servant-kamiya-seokia [bonded labourer]? It's a matter of hundreds of years. When did the Rajput brahman from outside come to this land of jungle and mountain? When did all the land slide into their hands? Then cheap labour became necessary. That was the beginning of making slaves on hire purchase. ("Douloti the Bountiful" 21)

The British presence in India changed the *adivasis'* relationship with the land, introducing the notions of individual property rights where there had been communal and occupancy rights, and exploitation for profit where there had been sustainable lifestyle. According to historians and anthropologists, before the intrusion of outsiders, the tribals lived in harmony with their environment, extracting from it their livelihood, consuming only the necessary, never more. As we know, British interest in India was primarily commercial and the British Raj was built on the foundations of the East India Company. From the beginning of their presence in India, the British established links with local elites of landholders, accountants, registrars, and watchmen to consolidate their power, and by doing so they reinforced the semi-feudal agrarian system in place at the time and imposed a system of landlord and tenant where there was none. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, land settlements were established to capitalize on the land, and a revenue system that ignored tribal tradition and custom was imposed: "The barter economy was ruthlessly replaced by money economy which the tribals could not handle properly. The traditional divisions or distributions of tribal land were now replaced by a rigid landlord-tenant relationship" (Jha 87). Failure to pay the fixed revenue (fixed rather than a percentage of the year's produce) could lead to land dispossession, and gradually *adivasi* land was transferred to non-*adivasis* who were more than happy to settle where land and cheap labour were so abundant, so bountiful. The *adivasis*, who had traditionally been cultivators, gatherers, and hunters, became hired agricultural workers, and eventually, because of extremely low salaries and the exploitative practices of the new landowners, who often doubled as moneylenders, bonded la-

bourers, that is, *kamiyas-seokias*. The construction of railways and roads in previously isolated regions also contributed to the disenfranchisement of the *adivasis*. They were gradually pushed out of areas where they had lived undisturbed for generations, and these lands were settled and developed by non-*adivasis*. Moreover, British colonial rule, using the Indian Forest Act of 1865 and the Revised Indian Forest Act of 1878 claimed control over forests that had also been traditionally considered as areas where *adivasis* had ancestral rights to hunt and gather. The colonial forest policy, meant to provide the necessary timber for ship-building and iron smelting, European forests having long been cut down, robbed the *adivasis* of an important source of livelihood. In short, British colonial presence ended communal ownership of land, transformed it into a saleable commodity, and accelerated the dispossession of the *adivasis*, a dispossession that continues to this day despite independence and a series of ineffectual and unenforced laws designed to prevent discrimination and exploitation.

The Independence of India signified in theory the end of colonialism, inequality, discrimination, exploitation, and the beginning of a fight against poverty. On 14 August 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru said in his eloquent speech to the Constituent Assembly in Delhi: "We have to build the noble mansion of free India, where all her children may dwell." And on 26 January 1950, the Indian Constitution enshrined these principles of equality with special provisions for the Scheduled Tribes, in other words for those who are legally recognized as tribals. The notification of certain ethnic groups as tribes privileges certain groups as it excludes others who might also have the legitimate right to be called tribals. Amar Kumar Singh's says, "The Constitution of India has promised the tribals of India protection against exploitation, respect for their tradition and heritage, assistance for the improvement of their socio-economic and educational status" (13). For example, article 46 of the constitution assured educational and economic benefits to the *adivasis* and promised protection against social injustice and exploitation, while article 335 guaranteed reservations in educational institutions, services, and political bodies. The latter can be said to have worked to a certain

extent but has had the nefarious effect of creating an elite class of tribals who participate in the exploitation of their own people. In his study of the bondage and exploitation of tribals, N. N. Vyas notes that in "the quarter century after India's independence, the distribution of economic opportunities and uneven development benefits brought status differentiation among the tribals. The social, political and economic awareness could come only to a few people, called the new elites" (129). In other words, a small group of educated *adivasis* profit from the new order, while the majority continues to be exploited, occasionally even by this new *adivasi* elite, referred to as "insider-dikus," "dikus" being the derogatory term used to refer to outsiders.<sup>4</sup> In reality, after independence, the process of land alienation, dispossession, and exploitation continued; some have argued that it has increased.<sup>5</sup> The post-independence thirst for the rapid development and industrialization of India, accompanied by huge public investment in development projects such as the Bhakra-Nangal dam in Punjab, the Tungabhadra project in Andhra Pradesh, the Hirakud dam in Orissa, the Rihand dam in Uttar Pradesh, and more recently the Narmada Dam project displaced millions of people from their land without offering them adequate compensation, drowned forest and arable land, and contributed to the growing gap between rich and poor and the pauperization of the *adivasis*. The exploitation of mines and the growing paper industry have also played their role in the disenfranchisement of tribal people and in growing deforestation. In a paper on tribal identity in Jharkand, Jareed Alam acerbically comments: "the state has acquired a status equivalent to the predatory colonial agents" (159).

I discuss "Douloti the Bountiful" within this historical context for two main reasons. In the first place, the story exposes the continued exploitation of tribals after Indian independence and the establishment of a Constitution that enshrined the principles of freedom and equality, banned discrimination, and outlawed landlordism and bonded labour. It is significant that Ganori Nagesia, Douloti's father, becomes a bonded-slave to a rich landowner after independence. The second reason is that "Douloti the Bountiful" establishes a parallel between the exploi-

tation of *adivasi* men who become bonded-labourers of the rich upper-caste landowner—their labour and the fruits of their labour are alienated from them—and the sexual exploitation of *adivasi* women who are used and abused because they are poor—they own nothing: not the means of their livelihood, nor their own bodies. In the introduction to *Imaginary Maps*, Devi says:

In Hyderabad, there is a special area where buyers from the Middle East buy women in the name of marriage. Parents flock there because they are so poor, they cannot give their daughters food and clothing. The basic reason is poverty. . . . As long as eighty percent of the Indian population lives below poverty lines, this cannot stop. Decolonization has not reached the poor. This is why these things happen. Women are just merchandise, commodities. (xx)

In other words, one type of oppression, in this case material oppression, leads to and sustains another, sexual oppression; but in the case of women, one oppression carries the weight of another. Women are, to use Spivak's terms, "the super-dominated, the super-exploited" (249).

Tribal women are oppressed on several levels. First, because they are women in a patriarchal and patrilineal society. Although in most tribal societies in India, women's position is relatively better than in Hindu caste society, property is still transmitted through the male line, and in general women do not have access to political power. Moreover, the sanscritization process, whereby lower castes, *dalits* and *adivasis* adopt some of the customs and practices of the upper castes such as dowry, *purdah*, restrictions on remarriage and on relations between men and women, has eroded severely the tribal women's social and economic status. Women are also oppressed because they belong to a group considered inferior because of its ethnic or caste position: "For most non-tribals in the area [Santhal Parganas], tribals are sub-human creatures, whose land is to be usurped, whose possessions are to be looted, who can with impunity be laughed at and pushed aside," (Stri Sangharsh; qtd in Kumar 139). And they are oppressed because as women they are used by those who have the power to oppress their people. Rape, torture, and forced prostitution are the means landowners and police employ to humiliate, punish, and establish control over an entire community which is economically and materially dependent. It is

important to note that historically for most *adivasis* pre-marital sex and remarriage are socially acceptable; however, sex with non-*adivasis* is considered taboo. The rape and sexual exploitation of *adivasi* women by Hindus and Muslims are a violation and humiliation for the entire social group. The rape of *adivasi* women by non-*adivasi* men can also be seen as an attempt to control female sexuality. The fact that sexual relations with non-*adivasis* are taboo for *adivasis*, while in general their sexual practices are more open than upper-caste Hindu and Muslim sexual practices, particularly for women, has angered non-*adivasi* men. Radha Kumar writes:

For non-tribals, the conflict between this taboo and the open sexuality of tribal women is an explosive one. The freedom of tribal women is a threat to diku morality—be it Hindu, Muslim or Christian. Unlike diku women, Santhali women are not ashamed of being women nor afraid of their sexuality. The dikus hate this freedom and say that they are “loose women.” They rape Santhal women to force them into fear, shame and subjugation. They rape to show their hatred and contempt for tribal society. (140)

“Douloti the Bountiful,” set in post-independence India in the small village of Seora in Palamu (Bihar), focuses on the plight of Ganori of the Nagesia tribe and his daughter Douloti. Ganori, a bonded-labourer, has been nicknamed Crook Nagesia following an accident where he becomes crippled after having been forced by his master to carry an ox yoke on his shoulders. The cruel and dangerous punishment literalizes Ganori’s condition as slave. From the moment he borrows 300 rupees from the landlord Munabar Chandela, he becomes his slave for an indefinite period of time because of increasing interest and recurrent social and economic needs. Ganori’s dreams are free, however, and the narrative opens with an account of his dreams of food and freedom:

Sometimes Crook imagines some bespectacled town gentleman who has come by car, and listening to him, is writing down everything. Actually these people have heard that the government is going to abolish the bonded labour system. The bespectacled gentry will come from the towns and write everything down on paper. This too is a dream. (20)



Ganori realizes that even when laws are passed, the rich and powerful such as Munabar Chandela can buy the law, the police, and have government's implicit support—Munabar has a son who is a government servant, “a top officer of the district's Lac Development Corporation” (38). Like Rushdie, Devi ironically uses the words “dream,” “fairy tale,” “story,” “yarn”; however, her irony is replete with anger at those who exploit the poverty-induced dreams. Moreover, her exposure of these dreams and myths is accompanied by a denunciation of the system of exploitation and the people who profit from it.

The narrator explains that Ganori became a bonded-servant after borrowing money from the landowner-moneylender, but she strongly suggests that although the direct cause of bondage is the loan,<sup>6</sup> there is a complex system in place that perpetuates the exploitation; a system that has been in place for a very long time—“a narrative that is as immemorial as the Ganga River or the Himalayas” (27)—and that is in place across India—“Different names in different regions. The system is slavery, the marginal, the harijan, the tribal is its sacrifice” (61). Devi is critical of the government's implication in the system but also of the blindness of sociologists who comment on bonded-labour and blame the labourers and their primitive traditions for their indebtedness:

. . . the sociologists travel around Palamu and write in their files, every sonavabitch is becoming kamiya because of weddings-funerals-religious ceremonies. That the peasant is becoming the Kulak's kamiya, this the sociologists avoid rather skillfully.

These savants want government support

The government wants the Kulak's support

Land-lender, this new agri-capitalist caste

This caste is created by the independent government of India

The government wants the support of the Kulak and the agri-capitalist. (49)

In other words, the source of bonded-labour is inequality: “What will come of the gormen abolishing bonded labour?” argues Douloti. “Without land, without food, hunger will drive the people of this society to become kamiyas again” (72). And land-lords, moneylenders, and government have a vested interest in keeping them poor.

While Ganori Nagesia is in the hospital recovering from his accident, a Brahmin approaches his daughter offering food and cloth. Upon Ganori's return, Paramananda the Brahmin pays his debt with the landlord and releases him from bondage, though not from poverty, in exchange for Douloti whom he promises to marry. Ganori accepts the exchange although he is suspicious. No one in the village has ever heard of a Brahmin marrying a Nagesia. Some blame Douloti for having attracted the Brahmin and others like Munabar are fully aware of the scheme which Paramananda has pulled many times before. Going around the poor villages and paying the debts of bonded-labourers, he has established a lucrative bond-labour trade of prostitutes. Bonded-slavery is transmitted from father to daughter: "Douloti has taken the yoke of Crook's bondslavery on her shoulders. . . . She will repay the bondslavery loan as a beggar" (73). But unlike her father who pays with labour, Douloti pays with her body. "[T]hey'll eat the fruit of your womb" (59), warns Rampiyari, the housekeeper and manager of the brothel Douloti is taken to. These words carry several layers of meaning. Apart from the obvious and crude sexual one, they suggest the violation of abortion, the forced prostitution of daughters, and the exploitation and destitution of the sons. At another level where land and woman are more intimately linked, it alludes to the appropriation of *adivasi* land by the same people who sexually exploit the women. Both before and after independence, a certain number of acts were passed in order to protect tribal lands from alienation (for example, the Estate Acquisition Act of 1954 and the Act of 1971). The governments, however, relaxed restrictions whenever certain lands were required, for example for coal mining or dam building. Moreover, non-*adivasi* men will make use of trickery, forgery, bribery, influence, as well as marriage to bypass the legal complications of acquiring tribal land.<sup>7</sup> In fact, it has been a common practice to marry *adivasi* women as a means of taking over traditional *adivasi* land. At times the women are abducted and forced into these marriages.

Rampiyari's song of bonded-prostitutes reinforces the association between *adivasi* women and land, possessions to be taken away and used at will for profit:

These are all Paramananda's kamiyas.  
 Douloti and Reoti and Somni  
 Field work, digging soil, cutting wells is work  
 This one doesn't do it, that one doesn't do it, the other one  
 doesn't do it—  
 The boss has turned them into land  
 The boss plows and plows their land and raises the crop  
 They are all Paramananda's kamiya.  
 They are all some people's *maat*—  
 Near the foot of the Himalayas in Jaunnar-Bauar  
 They don't say kamiya, they are called *maat*  
 Talsa and Bisla and Kamla  
 Kolta girls are some people's *maat*  
 Only field work and shoveling soil is work  
 This one doesn't do it, that one doesn't do it, the other doesn't  
 do it—  
 The boss had made them land  
 He plows and plows their bodies' land and raises a crop  
 They are all some people's *maat*. (59-60)

Rampiyari's painful song raises several interesting points. First that this type of sexual exploitation occurs across India; the women's names change, as does the name given to the bonded-labour (*kamiya-seokia-maat*), but not the type of exploiter or exploitation. Rampiyari reveals again a parallel between sexual exploitation and agricultural exploitation: the women are made into land; they are property or possession that can be used at will. The violence suggested by the words "plows and plows" is shocking and alludes both to the rape of women and to the appropriation and cultivation of the land by dikus. The tribal lands were traditionally considered communal lands, meaning lands that belonged to a community rather than to individuals, and their produce and resources were used and shared by the community that had cleared and cultivated it. J. C. Jha writes: "tribals believed that those who cleared the forest were entitled to cultivate the land and their descendants had a permanent right to it. The control over the village land rested with the whole village" (80).

Rampiyari also implies that while the exploitation of the agricultural bonded-labourers (who work without remuneration day after day, year after year, often across generations, to reimburse a debt incurred to pay for a funeral, a wedding, and, more important, food to survive) is recognized, that of the *kamiya*-whores is

not: "Field work, digging soil, cutting wells is work/this one doesn't do it, that one doesn't do it, the other/one doesn't do it." With these words, Devi points to a wider web of complicity than that of the landlord-moneylenders, government and police. Douloti's father sells her to pay his debt despite the fact that he feels uneasy about the transaction. Rampiyari ridicules the supposed ignorance and naïveté of the fathers who send their daughters with unknown men, supposedly with altruistic and progressive intentions: "Your fathers! They blow me away. The animal says marriage, he'll marry a Dusad, Dhobi, Chamar, Parhaiya girl? Brahmans? Who burn harijans? They catch you to make you a kamiya . . . now they'll eat the fruit of your womb" (59). In Somni's case, her husband sends her to pay his debt. In both situations, women are used to pay debts incurred by men, while the other men in the story either participate in the exploitation or stand by while it continues: Uncle Bono leaves Douloti in bondage; the doctor sends her to die in the streets; Prasad Mahato of the Harijan Association although he recognizes the desperate need of bonded-prostitutes will not fight for their freedom; Father Bomfuller's support consists in a survey of the incidence of bonded labour which will end up in a file; and Mohan Srivastava, the schoolmaster, "with all his sympathy for harijan and tribal kamiya-seokias" (88), maintains his faith in the government and the police, and does nothing to save Douloti.

The story ends in 1975, just as Indira Gandhi's Emergency begins, and Douloti, 27 years old, her body ploughed for 40 thousand rupees, is now dying of venereal disease and hunger. Douloti—once beautiful is now used, exploited, plundered, wasted, and abandoned. She walks to the village of Bohri, where Mohan Srivastava has been preparing for the celebration of Independence day by having a huge map of India drawn in the courtyard. Mohan Srivastava comes out of the school with an Indian flag in his hand to find Douloti dead on the map of India:

Filling the entire Indian peninsula from the oceans to the Himalayas, here lies *bonded labour* spread-eagled, kamiya-whore Douloti Nagesia's tormented corpse, putrefied with venereal disease, having vomited up all the blood in its desiccated lungs.

Today, on the fifteenth of *August*, Douloti has left no room at all in the India of people like Mohan for planting the standard of the Independence flag. What will Mohan do now? Douloti is all over India. (93)

This passage, echoing the morning after Douloti's first rape where she lay stretched out in pain and nakedness (58), suggests the complete identification of the exploited *adivasi* woman with India: she is all over India; she is India—meaning that the poor, exploited workers compose the majority of the people of India and that Independence is a lie for the vast majority of people in India or at the very least that it is meaningless to them. The special issue of *Granta* celebrating 50 years of independence offers a compilation of portraits, taken by photographer Sanjeev Saith, with accompanying quotations that tell of what these people were doing and thinking at the time of independence. The recollections of C. Narayani, a female domestic worker from Madras, are striking because they reveal the distance between those for whom independence meant freedom, celebration, power, and those for whom it meant nothing has changed:

At the time of Independence I lived in Madras—our family had come there from Kerala. I was one of five children. We got to know what was happening from the papers: they said there was a lot of fighting and people were dying. But there was no special occasion to celebrate. For us every day was the same. But someone gave us flags, and we celebrated. It was raining—even the farmhouses were full of water. (34)

Devi uses the image of the bonded-sex-worker lying dead on a map of India to denounce exploitation and to destroy the myth of a free India for all. She suggests that real independence is impossible as long as there is gender, social and material inequality enabling one group to abuse another. For people like Douloti the *kamiya*-whore, Narayani the domestic worker from Madras, the fisherwomen of Koli, the tribals in the hills and the bonded-labourers in the fields, independence means nothing except the continuing and, in cases, increasing exploitation, the growing disparity between rich landowners and poor landless agricultural workers, and the overwhelming complicity of the government, the police, the landowners, the moneylenders, and the devel-

opers. Douloti dies on the chalk dust of the map of a mythical India; and in the narrator's words, "the conclusion of the fairy tale is life, bloody, pain-filled life" (50).<sup>8</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 In June 1975, Indira Gandhi suspended constitutional rights. She maintained autocratic rule until 1977, when she was forced to resign after her party was defeated in national elections. Her government is known for its corruption, the city "beautification campaigns" (that is, slum razing, led by her son Sanjay), and forced sterilization of the poor.
- 2 Devi has also worked as a teacher, a journalist, and an editor. She has studied and lived among tribal communities and landless peasants in West Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, and was active during the rise of the Naxalbari movement in the late 1960s. For the past ten years, she has been working with the Kheria Sobors and the Lodhas of West Bengal on literacy programmes and the development of handicraft cottage industries. Her writing, both fictional and journalistic, reveals a concern with the oppressed and exploited people of India, as well as a strong commitment to exposing the social inequalities and injustices. In 1997, she received the Jnanpith prize, the most prestigious literary award in India, and the Magsasay award for her writings on India's indigenous communities.
- 3 A. R. Desai, for instance, classifies Indian tribes into four categories:
  - 1) tribal communities or those who are still confined to the original forest habitats and follow the old pattern of life;
  - 2) semi-tribal communities or those who have more or less settled down in rural areas and have taken to agriculture and allied occupations;
  - 3) acculturated tribal communities or those who have migrated to urban or semi-urban areas and are engaged in modern industries and vocations and have adopted modern cultural traits; and
  - 4) tribals totally assimilated with Indian population. (Singh 22).
- 4 Kelkar and Nathan note in *Gender and Tribe*: "When the British, for the first time, established an administrative machinery over the area, the intermediaries they had to use, whether traders, landlords, moneylenders, administrators, or lowly-clerks, and policemen, were largely from outside—leading to the identification of *diku* (meaning outsider) with exploiter" (24).
- 5 Winni Pereira, in "The Sustainable Lifestyle of the Warlis," writes that "*Adivasis* are being displaced by dams, power stations and other projects as well as from life sanctuaries and biological parks" (203), while Madhav Godbole, in his recent piece in *The Times of India*, "Crime and Punishment: Trying Times for Tribal Peoples," documents an increase in violence against adivasis. Moreover, Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf has argued that in certain remote and difficult of access areas, the British attitude was non-interventionist. For example, in the Union Territory of Arunchal Pradesh, formerly known as North East Frontier Agency, the majority of the tribal population lived in isolation, not having been brought under British administration. This situation has radically changed since independence.
- 6 In an essay published in *Seminar*, Devi quotes a song composed by Lodhas before 1855:
 

Damin, the Santhal area was a vast forest  
We came and cleared it, but the taxes and extortions!  
We ran to the Bengali money-lenders

In the month of Sravana he lends one rupee  
 By March the interest accrues to twenty-one rupees  
 He seizes our cattle  
 If we go to the Daroga, he demands money, abusing us  
 Such injustice forced us to rise and fight. (16)

- <sup>7</sup> von Fürer-Haimendorf describes the encroachment of outsiders on tribal land and the theft of this land through trickery, bribery, fraud, coercion, influence, and other methods. He relates specific cases of dispossession (587). He also contends that the situation in the 1970s and 1980s is similar to that in the 1940s.
- <sup>8</sup> I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for supporting my postdoctoral research on South Asian women writers.

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