

Pastoral Predicaments: The Gujars in History

Shail Mayaram

revised version of paper published in *Peasants and Pastoralists in the Marketplace: perspectives from Africa and Asia*, edited by Mahmood Mamdani. Monika Horstmann. Kampala: Makrere Institute of Social Research, 2015.

Pastoralism is one of the aporias that capitalist modernity in India has been unable to completely domesticate.¹ In this sense, it shares aspects of artisanal and adivasi livelihoods.² Pastoral lifeworlds, however, have increasingly come to denote a major site of inequality. This inequality—which has structural, historical, and discursive facets—is countered by aspirations and mobilisations oriented toward justice and equality, which repoliticise development and reinvent participatory democracy, to use the language of Sheth (2004: 46). Development is thereby rendered in the lower case by a fundamental and radical critique,³ which is manifest in a range of ecological movements of adivasi and peasant groups, ranging from Narmada's anti-dam movement in Gujarat to peasant protests over land acquisition by the Tatas in the village of Nandigram in West Bengal. The Gujar mobilisation of 2007-12 represented a similar upsurge of pastoralists, although it was coded around reservation and community. While the agitation achieved a temporary resolution through an order of the Rajasthan state giving five per cent reservation to denotified tribes, the larger predicament of pastoralism remains. This is a predicament that needs to be addressed, given the fact that India has one of the world's largest nomadic populations, estimated to be seven per cent of the country's total population, comprising five hundred communities and sustaining a range of animal life.

The shift of global power to the East and the rise of the Asian hemisphere has been much heralded (Mahbubani 2008). But issues remain. Sectors of the economy have been rendered increasingly vulnerable, and modernity and its consequences for difference and diversity are issues of on-going contention, along with the death of languages and cultural life forms signaled by modernity since the sixteenth century

¹This article is a revised version of one published in *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 47 (3). The term “aporia,” most recently made familiar by Derrida, comes from Plato's early dialogues expressing doubt about a path, which a knower has hitherto seen in terms of certainty.

² The term “adivasi” is used in this article despite the fact that it is of fairly recent vintage, *aranyavāsi* being the older term closer to forest peoples. To use the term “forest community,” however, would presume that the lifeworlds of their inhabitants are still connected to forests, ignoring processes of sedentarisation and occupational shifts such as to manual labour. The use of the terms “indigenous” and “aboriginal,” which mean “present from beginning,” are also inappropriate and reductionist of the complex histories of many adivasi groups (see on this Guha 1999: 5–6).

³ This is what is referred to as post-development (Escobar 2007; Ziai 2007).

and by globalisation since the late twentieth century. China's pastoralists border on the verge of extinction, while in India their survival is extremely precarious.⁴

The first part of this essay reviews the two moments of 2007 and 1857 in relation to the Gujars. Images from these two clusters of events, with their play of mirrors and shadows, cast light on the politics of identities and the institutions of the colonial and postcolonial state, both juridical and political, with implications for the role and functioning of print and electronic media, civil society formations (caste-based and other communities), the middle class and the market. They suggest the deep embedding of inequalities and the ways in which such inequalities are being challenged. While lower caste assertion had initially focused on displacing upper caste dominance, attention has turned to challenging the creamy layers within categories, particularly the middle castes. The second part of the essay locates pastoralism and the Gujars in history. The last part, meanwhile, examines the politico-administrative category, Scheduled Tribe, as a mode of violence. I argue that before determining which groups are to be notified Scheduled Tribes, the Indian state and civil society need to debate the grounds on which tribality is to be constituted. Currently there has been no attempt to ask paradigmatic questions about the basis on which the categories are determined.

Gujar Mobilisation in Two Events

Of 2007

On 26 May 2007 the Gujars of Rajasthan launched a mass protest demanding a shift in status from Other Backward Class (OBC) to Scheduled Tribe (ST). While this was reported in the media as "caste competition" and "caste war" (read: self-interest and greed), the protest arose from a growing resentment among the Gujars at their deepening marginality and livelihood crises. The Rajasthan state administration ignored the letters written by Gujar leaders to the Chief Minister reminding her of a promise made during the Assembly elections of 2003 that Gujars would be declared an ST instead of their current OBC status, through which they perceived themselves as being cornered by the inclusion of the Jats.

Between 29 and 31 May, the mass protests exploded in violence when police open fired on protesters in four separate instances in the twin villages of Pipalkhera-Patoli and Bundi civilians. Over the next few days, protesters left the bodies at Pipalkhera-Patoli un-cremated, on public display. Community became a formation of emotion constituted by death and mourning, deepening the sense of outrage that Gujar demands for equal citizenship and social justice had been met only with state violence.

⁴ Two outstanding films on Chinese pastoralists are Ulrike Koch's *The Saltmen of Tibet* and *Himalaya*.

The third week of June, I journeyed through the heartland of the Gujar revolt with a team from the People's Union for Civil Liberties – People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUCL-PUDR) that was investigating the violation of civil liberties. My own interest was in the extent of de-pastoralisation, the nature of Gujar protest, mobilisation, and leadership, and the violence of both state and community. Excerpts from my field diary follow⁵:

From Jaipur one moves southwards to the Gujar heartland of Sawai Madhopur, Dausa, Tonk, and Bundi. The heat of the late afternoon rages a good forty-six degrees. The land is a dry, rocky scrub. Here and there are small herds of twenty to twenty-five goats grazing on patches of grass. A shepherd and young girl seek shelter from the sun under a tree. Gujars do own land, we are told, but most are subsistence peasants with an acre or so per household. Rain-fed agriculture has been rendered negligible by the making of the Bisalpur Dam, which supplies water to cities and their rural hinterlands, but has led to the drying up of the seasonal Banas River that made at least a single crop possible. Many able-bodied Gujars are heavily dependent on the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) brought into being with considerable difficulty by civil society groups, the operation of which has been suspended after the firing.

In the evening, members of another section of the PUCL-PUDR team recounted their experience at Ghata, where they had met a Nath ascetic who was an eyewitness. "I was unable to eat for days later after what I saw, *dibbā ne āg lagāī* [the box caused the fire]," he said, alluding to cell phone use by a Mina mob. The policemen had fled the only police post in the village, rendering the state non-existent, and Gujars left the village to take shelter in the hills. Some ten thousand Minas who set up an ambush from one side used the cell phone to communicate with another group of Minas to attack the hill from the other side. Minas saw themselves as "protecting" their own "tribal" status by stressing Gujar exclusion.

We visited many homes at Bonli where the firing of 31 May killed four persons, the fallout of a congregation that had been organised at the local cow-shelter. The nine-day *yajña* (Vedic sacrifice) that began on 23 May attracted several thousand villagers. Many were drawn by the food cooked in *ghī* (clarified butter). As the crowd dispersed on the last day, the police version maintains, it turned violent. According to a Gujar

⁵ Fieldwork, Eastern Rajasthan, 2007.

lawyer, however, the police panicked and fired on a mixed-caste group returning from the *yajña*. In reaction an enraged mob of Gujars burnt vehicles, the police station, and the munsif court.

That there had been innocent deaths was clear when we visited the home of twenty-two-year-old Dayaram Gujar, killed in the firing. As the women broke into the customary dirge at our approach, his young widow sat in stunned stillness. Perhaps the girl child feeding at her breast and another young son would give her the will to live. The family had received a cheque as compensation. How much of this would she get, I wondered. There is more than enough evidence of patriarchies among both Gujars and Minas. This is part of a larger area, for instance, with extremely high maternal mortality; women are only hospitalised when they are on their deathbeds, medical professionals report. Not only did these women not know anything about the reservation question, several women on both the Gujar and Mina side were clueless about the sources of the Gujar agitation.⁶

The PUCL-PUDR report ultimately challenged the version of events put forward by the police. In Pipalkhera-Patoli, for instance, the report documented bloodstains from shootings that had occurred one hundred to two hundred yards from the main road—counter to the police version—and made recourse to post-mortem reports of villagers being shot in the back, i.e., while they were fleeing. Further, the report noted that the police circumvented the drill that mandated the use of *lathis* and rubber pellets preceding the use of gunfire (PUCL-PUDR 2007).

At Bundi, meanwhile, where eight persons were killed, the use of force was likewise deemed excessive and unnecessary by the PUCL-PUDR report. What appears to have triggered the initial state response was the congregating of some ten thousand Gujars at the temple to commemorate the death anniversary of Vijay Singh Pathik (1897-1947), their great freedom fighter and leader of the peasant *satyagraha* (Gandhian civil disobedience campaign) of 1918-20 against forced labour at Bijolia, Udaipur. In response, the state imposed prohibitory orders under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, with the District Collector—for reasons that remain unclear—anticipating a threat to Muslim shrines nearby. He arrived with the Gujar MLA to disperse the crowd. “All these people are militants,” he told the PUCL-PUDR team, suggesting how the contemporary discourse of terrorism is being used to describe civil protest even when it harkens back to older descriptions of Gujars in terms of their loot and plunder. A poster of the All India Gujar Vikas Sagathan of

⁶A newsletter for rural women called *Ujālā charī* reports the case of a dalit person belonging to the Dholi caste (traditionally drummers) who was killed by some Gujars because a young Gujar girl had fallen in love with him. The report suggests an incident evoking the ways in which caste/tribes police their boundaries. Castes such as the Gujars and Minas have long been considered śudra (low-caste but ritually clean) groups because of their status as peasant cultivators. They have also been known to practice untouchability against dalit castes.

Bundi that I obtained announces a night vigil and cultural programme of *goṭhan* singing and a *phaṛ-kathā* (story telling with a painted scroll) performance by well-known bards. Most certainly there are antecedents from the Gujar role in the peasant insurgency of 1857. The poster advertises the largest-ever Gujar congregation on 29 May in support of the Gujar demand for ST status, to be addressed by Colonel Kirori Singh Bhainsla and other national and regional party leaders. The leaflet specifically invites “empowered women” to the congregation!

In early June, the protest against the May killings led, for the first time in the history of postcolonial India, to a massive communal mobilisation that had managed to virtually close off road access to the national capital. Jaipur, the state capital, was likewise under virtual siege; roadblocks on the routes to Delhi, Tonk, Bundi, and Ahmedabad effectively brought traffic to a standstill on two national highways—NH11 and NH8—the latter of which is one of the main arteries of the Indian economy. Twenty out of twenty-six districts of Rajasthan were affected. Gujar leaders had declared their intent to pursue nonviolent struggle, but the protests soon turned violent. The impasse of state and community led to the burning of buses and trains, with property losses estimated at approximately Rs 600 million.

Meanwhile, Vasundhara Raje, then chief minister of Rajasthan, salvaged a political disaster by adopting the old imperial stratagem of using one community to counter another. Mina Ministers in her cabinet mobilised their community, urging members to launch a counter-siege, including of food grains, sugar, and potatoes. State helicopters brought two ministers to address meetings of Minas. Gujar ST status will endanger Mina reservation, a crowd was told. An Arakshan Bachao Sangharsh Samiti (Save Reservation Agitation Forum) was formed. Armed gangs of Mina males began circulating.

A judicial inquiry into both the series of firings and the counter-mobilisation was called for. Instead, the Supreme Court of India pronounced Gujars responsible for the “national shame.”⁷ It had up until then taken no cognisance of the much more widespread violence of the Maoists and had a somewhat delayed response to Gujarat where a pogrom had taken place, let alone grappling with the state sponsored civil militia of Salwa Judum. But the Gujars had shaken Delhi’s gated neighbourhoods. Without so much as a comment in passing for those who had lost their lives, the apex court’s judgment saved its ire for the destroyers of “property.” This and its judgment evicting street vendors in Delhi suggested that the right to property was being prioritised over the right to life and livelihood.⁸

⁷ <http://www.hindu.com/2007/06/16/stories/2007061605260500.html>.

⁸The Supreme Court subsequently amended this stance when it declared illegal and unconstitutional the deployment of tribal youth as Special Police Officers in the areas affected by Maoist insurgency and ordered “fast-track” or expedited trial courts to prosecute cases of the Gujarat violence (2002).

Political parties involved in both the ruling coalitions of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) were largely silent on the Gujar protests. They did not want to harm prospective vote banks by taking a position. Both print and electronic media followed the statist construction, writing about “Gujar violence,” “caste war,” and civil strife.

For the New Indian Middle Class, the “wild” had risen, disturbing the order of the city—an age-old metaphor. It affirmed for them all that colonial anthropology had written about the Gujars. Some cited the *Baburnama*, which “proved” that even the Mughal Emperor, Babur (who in this construction epitomises order and rule rather than temple breaking!), had to confront the unruly Gujars of Agra. Statements like “They have always been looters and dacoits” [*yeh to hamesha se hī lutere, dakait the*] went along with a series of popular aphorisms, which were treated as indexical of ethnological facticity. At a meeting that Yogendra Yadav and I attended with a municipal legislator of Delhi at the culmination of a sit-in of street vendors led by our colleague, Madhu Kishwar, the municipal leader declared, “*mār kāt to inke khūn main hai*” [killing is in their blood].

Such constructions deny the Gujars their own self-representation that localises crime and violence in, say, areas such as the Dangs (the districts of Sawai Madhopur, Dholpur, and Karauli, regarded as a particularly dark and underdeveloped region of Rajasthan). It negates the very important distinction between crime and banditry, a phenomenon that characterises peasant and pastoral societies the world over. Ranajit Gush (1983) famously made the point that banditry is political rather than pre-political, contra Eric Hobsbawm (1969), and that it is an important feature of Indian society contra Barrington Moore Jr (1966), who had argued that in India, caste impeded banditry.⁹

Indeed, during the pre-colonial and early colonial period, persons of many castes took to *dharaiti* (banditry). An extensive literature has demonstrated that this was the outcome of historical contingency, with no pre-given caste essences responsible for the circulation of mixed caste bandit groups, including gangs of Minas, Gujars, Mewatis, and occasionally even brahmans and often organised by Rajputs (see Mayaram 2003; Radhakrishna 2001).

Indian army officials hold forth on Gujar petty crime across the Indo-Pakistan border. What is silenced in their narrative is what the militarised border has done to Gujar pastoralists by criminalising their cross-border mobility and the ways in which both Indian and Pakistani armies have turned impoverished Gujars into double agents.

⁹ For a critical review of how Guha expands the idea of the political from that available in European political thought, see Chakrabarty (2000). As my colleague, Ravikant, points out, there is a close relation between the *lathait* and the *dharait*, i.e., he who uses the *lath*/staff and he who makes raids.

Since 1987, the nomadic populations of Jammu and Kashmir have been further subject to a range of repressive actions by Indian security forces (INTACH 2005).

With the appointment of a committee chaired by Justice Chopra to review the Gujar demand for ST status, the agitation was withdrawn. Its report, however, did not recommend giving them ST status. Instead, it called for a review of the indices and pointed to the “development deficit” of the Gujar-dominated areas in the southern and south-eastern districts of Rajasthan and the dearth of roads, electricity, education, and modern medicine, resulting in poverty and deprivation. It highlighted state neglect and a situation so urgent as to be advisable not to wait for reclassificatory processes to begin redressing. It also advocated a Board for Underdeveloped Areas. In response, the Rajasthan administration announced an aid package of Rs 2820 (then USD 67) million, but it was rejected by the Gujars as inadequate.

A year later, in 2008, Gujars mobilised once again, this time at Bayana (Bharatpur), with similar tragic results. Thirty-eight deaths resulted from police firing, with a policemen also killed in the process. Rail services between Jaipur and Delhi were suspended. Ten military columns were brought in and paramilitaries (the Rapid Action Force and Central Reserve Police Force) were deployed.

As had occurred in Pipalkhera-Patoli a year earlier, protestors left the bodies of the deceased un-cremated. That death and its display should occur and remain in the public domain suggests the politics of despair. Indeed, one need only imagine the emotional toll of sitting night after night with un-cremated bodies to grasp the enormous significance of such protest. These are moments that express the wounds of history in which the public display of pain should be nationally marked rather than dismissed.

Eventually, state authorities in Rajasthan announced a five per cent reservation for denotified tribes, including Gujars, Banjaras, Gohadiya Lohars, and Raikas, ignoring that Gujars had actually never been a notified tribe. This, along with the reservation of fourteen per cent for Economically Backward Castes, constitutes a law that will most likely be struck down by the courts, given that, within any individual state, reservations can accommodate no more than fifty per cent of the state’s total population, according to a Supreme Court judgement. With the new allocations for denotified tribes, reservations in Rajasthan now accommodate a cumulative total of sixty-eight per cent of the state’s population—something which the Rajasthan High Court has asked the state government to justify.¹⁰ In addition, state authorities promised relief of Rs 500,000 and a government job to the families of those killed, and Rs 100,000 to those who were seriously injured, along with Rs 25,000 to those

¹⁰ <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/justify-reservation-beyond-50--capital-in-state-hc-to-rajasthan/1063723>, accessed on 23 January 2013.

who sustained minor injuries.¹¹ The agitation was eventually withdrawn, but the larger issues still remain, including those of pastoral futures. Quotas can, at best, give a section of the marginalised access to education and state employment. But the sources of inequality remain and are embedded in capital in the era of globalisation, national sovereignties, the sedentarising impetus of the state, regimes of property rights, the dominant development paradigm, and the unthinking discourse of institutions and the middle classes. How heavily compromised we are by colonial anthropology and history will become further apparent in the following section that debates a celebrated contemporary account. But the record of Gujar participation in the revolt indicates complex processes of displacement of the Gujars by the colonial regime rather than a mere straightforward narrative of looting and plunder.

Of 1857

The Mutiny/Uprising/Revolt of 1857 was officially commemorated in 2007 after more than 160 years. I have been involved in a debate with William Dalrymple over his contention of the Uprising of 1857 as the first *jihād* or battle in the clash of civilisations.¹² In a response to one of my articles on the Gujars, he wrote to me asserting “that to characterise the Gujar contribution to 1857 as primarily anti-*firangi* is again stretching the evidence. Just look at the press list of the Mutiny papers to all the references to the Gujars looting Nizamuddin, Pahargunj and the other suburbs of Delhi as well as attacking the king’s messengers and envoys.”

My response to him was that it is somewhat strange that the ghost of Samuel Huntington should haunt the reading of a historical event, one hundred and sixty years old! One might accept that *jihādīs* (including *ghazīs* and *mujahidin*) grew to be a quarter of the total fighting force by the end of the siege of Delhi; that Christians who were killed were regarded as *kāfirs* or infidels rather than as *firangīs* (foreigners), going by the Urdu press; and that a call for *jihād* was given from Delhi’s major mosque. But the deployment of terms like *jihād* and *kāfir* is contingent and needs to be contextualised. Our use of this term—“religion”—continues to be conditioned by a Euro-centric, post Enlightenment discourse that implicitly constructs a religious/secular binary. Can we really comprehend what “religious” meant in mid-nineteenth India, which is quite different from what it means today or what it meant in contemporary Europe? Indeed, notions of “law,” “custom,” and “religion” were actually taking shape during this period, as Veena Das has pointed out (2003).

Further, both the *sepo*y-centric and Delhi-centric understandings need to be challenged so as to incorporate the histories and intentionalities of peasant, pastoral, and forest-dwelling communities belonging to different regions. Yes, the mutiny was

¹¹ Relief package for Gujjar victims, *The Hindu*, 19 June 2008.

¹² William Dalrymple, “The Last Mughal and a Clash of Civilisations,” *New Statesman*, 16 October 2006.

at its core a mutiny of not just *sepoys* but of peasant-pastoral-tribal populations (that represent, more often than not, a continuum), which formed their own armies! Once these were mobilised it is hardly surprising that they behaved as such collectives often do, looting *qasbahs* and cities, their markets and suburbs, attacking *baniyas* and *rajās* and their envoys who were seen as allied with the British.

This was the case with the revolt of the Munda forest communities that led to the insurrection of Birsa Munda of 1864. The term *kāfir* was deployed for the English as they reacted to the new presence of church outposts and to land transfers to outsiders, as K.S. Singh's work demonstrates. It was also the case with the Meos, which I have discussed extensively elsewhere (Mayaram 2003).

With respect to the Gujars, Eric Stokes complicates causality by foregrounding the role of community defined by caste as much as religion (though the two can hardly be disaggregated) and highlighting the existence of local inter-caste—and, by implication, inter-religious—networks (1978). The description of the Saharanpur, Meerut, Bulandshahr, and other districts of the United Provinces complicates the picture of Gujar “looters.” Indeed, looting itself arises from a generalised sense of disaffection. Stokes points out that differential taxation was a major grievance among backward Pandir Rajputs and Batar Gujars of Saharanpur and among advanced cash crop Jat farmers of western Meerut and northeastern Mathura.¹³ Such groups had strong “democratic” clan structures and could disown superior traditional leadership. There were also collaborating Gujars and Jats, as in the case of the house of Landhaura in Saharanpur or the Jat *raja* of Mursan in Aligarh. In the same castes that were less democratically organized, local leaders sprang up and proclaimed themselves *rajās*, like Gujar Kadam Singh of Parikshitgarh (Parrichatgarh) near Meerut. They had forts and kept armed retainers (Stokes 1978, ch 5).

In Meerut, popular disturbances involved Gujar, Rangar, and Rajput peasant communities, but also Jat clans. In Bulandshahr, Nawab Mohammad Walidad Khan of Malagarh, whose family properties had been whittled down, contacted Gujars in the Yamuna areas where eighteen entire villages belonging primarily to them had been alienated. They rose in Sikandarabad *pargana* on 12 May 1857, “pillaging and plundering along the roads, burning the rest houses and destroying the telegraph wire” (Stokes: 144-5). It is not clear whether the huge Gujar attack of 12 May was incited by the Nawab. It was led by Umrao Singh with the dual object of plundering the treasury and releasing forty-six Gujar prisoners captured by the 9th Native Infantry. Crown witnesses later alleged that the Nawab instigated the Gujar sacking of Sikandarabad that took place on 29 May. He certainly mobilised them at Baral to prepare an attack on Bulandshahr. Gujars plundered travelers between Ghaziabad

¹³ This discussion draws on Stokes (1978), chs 5 and 6.

and Sikandarabad, burnt houses, and looted belongings. Gujars also joined with Muslim Chauhans whose villages had been lost to private sale and mortgage by 1865, only to have Gujar villages confiscated for rebellion. But there were also caste rivalries encouraged by the state. Hence the British filled the ranks of the new district police with Jats, rather than depend on Gujars.

Ranajit Guha's classic on peasant insurgency analyses how rebels confer, plan, assemble, and attack (1983).¹⁴ In the case of the Gujars, the attack was planned in *panchayat* (local council) meetings held in villages such as Cheetee, Deotah, and Dadree. In Saharanpur District, rebellion was widespread in the *parganas* of Deoband, Rampur, Nakur, and Gangoh. What Stokes calls Gujar heartland (which is actually called Gujarat) included fifty-two villages of Gangoh, Lakhnauti, held by the Batar clan of Gujars.

Thousands of Gujars throughout the District of Meerut participated in the insurgency and proposed to establish a Gujar government, electing a *raja* and even raiding Jat villages loyal to the British. In Bulandshahr District, the Gujars in alliance with the Girooas and Gahlot Rajputs convened an inter-communal *panchayat* at Tillbegampur and planned an attack on the jail of Bulandshahr to rescue prisoners. Gujar rebels burnt Dak Bungalows, attacked the telegraph line, and raided the towns of Bulandshahr and Sikandarabad. In Bijnaur District, Gujars on one side of the Ganga River came to the aid of Gujars on the other side. The collective violence mobilised Mewatis, Banjaras, and Balochis, along with Gujars.

We know “little of actual mechanics of autonomous mobilisation—the pull of the primordial ties of kinship, community, and co-residence, the power of rumour, the compulsion of custom and religion,” Guha points out (1983: 118). The mobilisation could assume a religious form, but it was “the rather secular idiom of communal festivity and corporate labour” that characterised agrarian uprisings, he maintains. He maintains that the territoriality based on the ethnic character of uprisings and on primordial loyalties and co-residential solidarity did not involve class-consciousness. It fell short of the domain of the nation, given that caste sometimes fought against caste or that villagers sometimes prevented the movement of rebels. The resistance eventually splintered into a hundred local revolutions and their reactions, Guha maintains, citing Engels and Mao. But it did contribute elements to what would be the more generalised struggles of the twentieth century (Guha 1983: 331-32). While Chakrabarty (2000) sees historicism/anthropologisation as problematic in Guha's work, I see the secular/religious binary as the source of the problem, reminiscent of the idea of religion as false consciousness.

¹⁴ This discussion draws upon Guha's reflection on Modality and Territoriality (1983: chs 4 and 7). The other aspects of Guha's structural reading include Negation, Ambiguity, Solidarity and Transmissions.

The Revolt of 1857, then, was many revolts with multifaceted sources. The official reading saw it in terms of plunder and as political, while Stokes (1978) saw its motivation as economic, arising from the loss of land to the moneylender. Guha emphasises its dual character, its ambiguity (1983: 317-8). Contrary to Dalrymple's contention, what is apparent from the above description is a complex inter-communal history that connects Gujars to Muslim Chauhans and Gujars to Rajputs, to which I will return.

The question is the contrasting nature of peasant insurgency and protest before 1900 and after 2000.¹⁵ Clearly, while the protests around 1857 sought to challenge the colonial state, the activism of the 2000s accepts a statist framework. In 2007, inequality was signalled by a more complex conjuncture of community-state relations involving the state's use of coercive power, the Supreme Court's pronouncement, and the verdict of the media and middle classes that deemed the protest a caste war and in line with a presumed Gujar history of plunder. The massive mobilisation that recurred in 2008 was enabled by newer technologies of transport and communication and the prospects of an election, generating pressure on the Rajasthan state to reach a settlement. Neither community nor state has in the process addressed the growing crisis of pastoralism and what seems to be growing into the depeasantisation, depastoralisation, and detribalisation of Indian society.

In the pre-colonial period, mobilities were widespread and recognized by political authority and sometimes even constitutive of them, as in the case of Mongols. I have argued elsewhere that mobility was a defining feature of Asia (Mayaram 2008). Ludden points out the phenomenal mobility of South Asia, where zones or corridors of mobility stretched across highlands, hills, deserts, and jungle areas, and have been ignored by the "civilisational history" authored by elites of sedentarising states (1994). In the eighteenth century, half of the region's population was mobile, including artisans, workers, peasants, merchants, nomads, pilgrims, soldiers, and people fleeing famine and flood. But by 1900, sedentary territorialism had become the norm, with migrants having become "people out of place in the book of modernity" and mobile folk reduced to "aliens in social theory, social science, and political practice..." (Ludden 2003: 1064).

From the twelfth century, as Gommans (1998) highlights, the Arid Zone in South Asia was part of the larger Eurasian experience of the frontier, where pastoral-nomadic life forms encountered the sedentary agrarian. Each of these had their flourishing mixed economies of wandering pastoralists and settled peasants.¹⁶ Pastoralists

¹⁵ A recent workshop on "The peasant then and now: Fifty years of *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*," raised the question of the difference between pre-modern and contemporary insurgencies, CSDS, Delhi, 15-16 February 2013.

¹⁶ The following discussion draws upon Gommans (1998).

inhabited the steppes, deserts, and forests of Eurasia. These dual economies characterised, in particular, Central Asia and the Middle East and are described by Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) and, more recently, by Ernest Gellner (1991). Both here and in China, tribes and nomads made frequent inroads, whether by raids or investments in the settled world. China managed, however, to keep its outer frontier with the pastoral-nomadic world in place.

In South Asia, there was a complementary opposition between *grāma* (village) and *araṇya* (forest), which was inhabited by mobile people. The *grāma* depended on the *araṇya* for pastures, land, manpower, and forest produce. Gommans sees the dual economy of South Asia as belonging to the Middle Eastern and Central Asian pattern with an inner frontier. South Asia became more closely linked at the beginning of the second millennium to Saharasia, including the dryer zones of Eurasia.

From the twelfth century the Arid Zone in South Asia emerged as a particularly vibrant frontier region, finding its cultural counterpart in the spread of the Turko-Persian ecumene: a cultural mix of Arabic, Persian, and Turkic elements. Peasant life was highly vulnerable given low rainfall, but there was a rich supply of nutritious natural grasses, fodder crops, and forest scrub, with the stalk and leaf of dry millet serving as supplementary fodder. Animal herds of cattle, sheep, and goat moved along the western Ghats, Himalayas, and the fringes of the Arid Zone, transporting people, animals, goods, and ideas. Land, however, was much in demand from warrior ascetics, long-distance traders, and the new warrior elite consisting of both Hindus and Muslims. It was mainly through pastoralists, merchants, warriors, and pilgrims that this frontier “brought its surrounding territories of South Asia together but also made them part of that even wider ecumene of Turko-Persia” (Gommans 1998:17).

Gommans situates medieval South Asia as a region that was neither wholly sedentary nor wholly pastoral, but rather a place where internal frontier zones existed between these two ecological types. From the twelfth century onward, these zones were invigorated by the growing resources of mobile groups. Hence, state-building increasingly hinged on spanning the divide between arid jungle and humid arable land. Mobilities comprised warriors and warbands; ascetics, monks, and brahmins; merchants and traders; peripatetic or itinerant groups; and nomads of various kinds and with varied skills. Pastoralism, of course, is only one of the nomadic economies; others are based on agriculture, trade, or a combination of the two. Gommans’s picture is of medieval South Asia with extensive jungles, deserts, savannas, and forests and populated by pastoral nomads and animals—a history that is primarily dependent on the oral traditions of marginal groups.

Histories of Mobility

Gujar Migration

The heterogeneity of the Gujars derives from histories of migration, settlement, livelihood, and religious practice. There is said to have been a wave of migration from Georgia (Gurjia or Gurjaristan) in Central Asia through the territories of contemporary Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan (Baluchistan), but this is primarily speculative. Descriptions suggest that during the sixth and seventh centuries, a breakdown of the famous Gujj tribe that lived in south Khurasan (Central Asia) took place and some of its groups, after failing to capture Ghazna, came to Hind. There is evidence in support of the settlement of such tribes known as Gurz or Jurz in most parts of Rajasthan after the eighth century. They became part of East Persian and South Khurasanian tribes.¹⁷

The original home of the Gurjara Pratiharas was Bhillamala-Jalor, an area that was called Gurjara before Yuan Chwang's time. The Pratiharas continued to be known as Gurjara even after they had moved away from their original home and established an empire at Kannauj, meaning that they carried the name Gurjara with them (Sharma 1966: 472-3). After the eighth century, the term designated a territory *Gurjaradesa* and referred to inhabitants of different castes.¹⁸

Current estimates of the Indian population of Gujars vary from sixteen to fifty-three million.¹⁹ The heterogeneous category has historically included the Gujar-Pratihara rulers of western India; the Gujjar and Bakkarwal nomads of Jammu and the Kashmir valley, who are today mostly Sunni Muslim but still largely support the National Conference; the cow and goat herders of Rajasthan; and the peasants of Uttar Pradesh. In Uttaranchal, the van Gujjars are forest communities that, as in Rajasthan, inhabit the forests of the Aravalli Mountains. Gujars are spread over Pakistan and are part of the subcontinent's student and worker diasporas in the West (Werbner 1990). Regrettably, barely a thumbnail profile of the Gujar can be provided given the paucity of community ethnographies. There is no account after Bingley's late-nineteenth-century work (1978).

Before we move to discuss the Gujars in Rajasthan, some clarification is called for. Among the patterns of nomadism are three primary ones that refer to hunter-gatherers, peripatetic wandering groups based on a skill or trade, and pastoralists.

¹⁷ Based on personal communication, GSL Devra, 24 July 2008.

¹⁸ Gurjaradesa, according to Yagnik and Sheth, occurs in an eighth century *apabhramsha* work of the Jain monk, Udyotansuri, entitled *Kuvalayamala*, and recurs in *prabandha* literature (2005). The poet Bhalan refers to Gujar *bhakha* or the Gujarati language. Gurjar Pratihara rulers are also mentioned by Arab travelers.

¹⁹ <http://gujarcommunity.org/population.html>, accessed November 1, 2013.

Pastoralism, then, is only one of the nomadic economies, the others being based on agriculture, trade, warfare, or performance, or a combination. Further, two broad types of pastoralists have been identified. Transhumant pastoralists move seasonally between two locations, in one of which at least they have permanent homes in villages (Rao and Casimir 2003a). Pastoral nomads also have a seasonal migratory pattern depending on their animals' needs for fodder and water, but do not have permanent settlements and live instead in encampments of tents or carts.

Gujars in Rajasthan

Among the pastoralists in Rajasthan are shepherds whose livelihoods are centred on the sheep, goat, or camel, and cattle herders whose cultural economy is centred on the cow. The Gujars, like the Ahirs, are dominantly associated with the cow, although many are also owners of herds of goats and sheep. The semi-arid region developed a more symbiotic relation between agriculture and livestock-rearing. Gujars have small landholdings and their subsistence has depended on cattle, sheep, and camel rather than on agriculture. The pastoral Raika (also called Rebari), who are the other major group of pastoralists in Rajasthan, are concentrated to the west, while the Gujar populations are concentrated around the Aravalli mountains that bisect the state north to northwest.

Over a period of time, the Gujars developed a close interface with the caste/village society with which they integrated. They inhabited two of the three main ecological and economic zones in Rajasthan, identified by Komal Kothari (see Bharucha 2003). The millet (*bajra*) growing areas of the west have had a predominance of cattle-breeding; the sorghum (*jowar*) areas of the east saw a dominance of cattle-herding. And the maize (*makki*) growing area of the south has been dominated by hunter-gatherer adivasi communities inhabiting forests, although they are now considerably detribalised. Each eco-zone has produced its own epics or cultural performance texts. These are thematically organized around cattle raids from the western zone, conflicts between grazers and rulers in the eastern areas, and encroachments of settled, agricultural people into the forest that serves as the living space of the Bhils and Minas in the south.

From the sorghum-growing area comes the Gujar narrative of *Devnārāyan* or *Bagarāvāt*, which tells the story of the conflict between Devnārāyan, the Gujar chief of 980,000 cattle and buffaloes, and the Rajput Rānā, sovereign of fifty-two forts, in order to free captive cows. Kolff reads it as a clash between pastoralism and the claims of genealogical status and territorial rule (1990: 84). Malik highlights the interface between pastoral and agrarian society—the Bagarāvāt heroes are born of Gujar inter-caste alliances with Rajputs, brahmans, and baniyas in different versions of the story. Ambivalence characterizes the relationship between Gujars and Rajputs, which is shaped by simultaneous kinship and conflict that is intrinsic to the idea of

sociality pervading the narrative (Malik 2004). Hildebeitel has argued that there is an underground circulation of folk epics that enriches the mobile Afghan-Rajput culture (1999: 318). The two major Rajasthan historical epics of Pābū and Devnārāyan, for instance, relate to low and mobile castes (Hildebeitel 1999, 102, 318; Smith 1991).

Pre-modern kingdoms, despite the prevalence of tensions, attempted to cultivate a symbiotic relationship with pastoral groups, as was the case with the Raika/Rabari, the largest group of pastoralists in Rajasthan and Gujarat.²⁰ The pastoralists grazed the herds of the nobility, colonised sparsely inhabited tracts, and in return, had access to the commons. The colonial state deepened the sedentarising impetus of the pre-modern polity. Singh maintains that state relations with nomads were problematic also in pre-modern polities, but that ecological diversity enabled diverse socio-economic systems that, with time, turned into a “clash between...cultures” (Singh 1995: 48, cited in Rao and Casimir 2003b). As Rao and Casimir put it, “British domination affected South Asian nomadism drastically, either by curbing it or by increasing the migration phases of forcing the nomads to seek new pastures” (2003b: 229). Forest laws and policies that entailed the privatisation of forests legislated after the 1860s excluded pastoralists from pastures and restricted access to forests. Scott points to the ways in which modern states introduced practices of “legibility” by classifying and measuring land (1998). Migratory circuits were drastically modified or fixed, with mountain pastoralists being forced to retreat to higher altitudes, as in the case of Gaddi herders, while Gujars moved into Kashmir, being forced out of the Chenab canal colony area (Saberwal 1996: 8; Rao and Casimir 2003b: 231; see also Agarwal 1999 and Gadgil and Guha 1992 on colonial ecology).

Mobility was read as impoverishment and criminalised following Europe, where gypsies epitomised poverty and vagrancy. Overlaid with the colonial imagination of caste and tribe, landlessness was identified with danger and insurgency, metaphored by the Afghan tribes and the virtual impossibility of domesticating the northwestern frontier. British paranoia grew as the pastoralists Batty, Pachada, and Rangar were prominent among the soldiers of the early phase of the 1857 uprising. Groups of pastoralists and hunter-gatherers were identified as Criminal Tribes. The Gujars were notified as a criminal tribe in British India. Categories such as criminality imbued knowledge systems that were internalised by the ruling elites of the indigenous states, their inhabitants and, indeed, by subject populations. Added to this was their tribality, elaborated upon in colonial ethnographies. Bingley, for instance, cites Crooke on Gujar turbulence and cattle stealing (1978).

Kavoori refers to two kinds of migration, one transhumant and the other nomadic. Transhumance characterises eastern Rajasthan shepherds who might travel as

²⁰ See Gold and Gujar (2002) for a story of tension between the kingly elite and the Gujars.

much as a thousand miles to graze sheep and camel herds in the forests of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh, returning to their homes as the rainy season begins. Kavoori examines a case from 1974 in which the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department constructs shepherds as sources of desertification (2005).

Mobility, then, is an entrepreneurial, security-directed strategy, particularly when it comes to coping with hunger and famine, rather than an embodiment of primitivity (see also Sharma 1994). Kavoori maintains that, to the contrary, pastoralism represents sustainability and a dynamic system of renewable resource use and is not a dying way of life. Pastoralists contribute to modern medicine and produce for distant markets. They are undergoing a process of radical economic and ecological transformation by incorporating and adapting to changing institutional and environmental conditions and potentially contributing to shaping a vision of alternative development (Kavoori 2005: 225). While Kavoori brings out the adaptability of pastoralists, it is not always the case that they are “survivors.” As Kavoori himself points out, developmentalism “treated pastoralism as a residual historical category” that would be adequately domesticated. The state’s coercive power and juridical authority was used to establish the command economy, and environmentalism itself became an ideology of control (2005, 217). Indeed, the fragility and vulnerability of pastoral lifeworlds seems to be a global story.

Contrary to communal histories, Gujars forged alliances across “boundaries” of caste and religion both in 1857 and in 2007. In the nineteenth century in southwest Saharanpur, for instance, Batar Gujars mixed heavily with Muslim Gujars and with Turkman and Sheikh communities. “A decayed Muslim gentry living alongside an impoverished Gujar and Rangar peasantry were combustible materials readily ignited, especially when the powerful Jat brotherhoods of Shamli and the Rajputs of Budhana made common cause with them,” writes Stokes (1978:183).

In 2007 again the inter-religious aspect of the protests was important. The congregation of the Gujar Mahapanchayat held at Pushkar on 24 June 2007 that I attended was a landmark moment for Indian democracy. A crowd of 50,000 (by conservative estimates) mobilised and staged a peaceful protest. Pushkar is a sacred centre for the Gujars and their god, Devanarayan. There were many young male faces at Pushkar, but not a single untoward remark or incident occurred. Noticeably there were many female figures both on the dais and the rug. This was interesting in view of the strong patriarchies among landholding castes. The effort was to keep it completely non-partisan and to refrain from making any negative remarks about another caste. While many read the mobilisation as an expression of a monolithic identity, what is interesting is the very diversity that the Mahapanchayat encoded. There were Gujars here from several states: Muslim Gujars from Amethi in Uttar Pradesh and from Jammu and Kashmir who played a prominent role in the proceedings; Gujar shepherds and peasants from Haryana and Gujarat; and Gujar

milkmen from Delhi and Kota, rendering the city without milk vendors for two days. One of the major pamphlets in circulation was authored by Khurshid Bhati, a Kashmiri Gujar with a picture of Nehru on the cover exhorting them to sedentarise (Bhati 2007).

A sense of pain was articulated in speech after speech at Pushkar. They were troubled that the deaths of their young had received neither compassion nor compensation. Instead the state had launched a full-scale drive to arrest all their leaders, slapping them with criminal charges. The Mahapanchayat was a show of strength—the demonstration of numbers in order to bargain with the state.

What remained unspoken, unarticulated at the Mahapanchayat was the livelihood crisis deriving from the dominance of the technologies of the tractor and the tubewell (Kavoori, unpublished). This has resulted in the Gujar mainstay, the cow, becoming redundant to mechanised agriculture. Added to this is the rapid erosion of the commons, displacing shepherds from their grazing lands (see also Agarwal 1999). The *sawāī-chak* pastures are readily sacrificed for agricultural or industrial development. Gujar pastoralist-peasants have been “rehabilitated” (read: displaced) from the Sariska, Ranthambhor, Rajaji, and the Jim Corbett National Parks, the most recent being the current attempt to remove them from the Keola Deo Sanctuary of Karauli. As industrialisation and urbanisation foster an ever-thirsty economy, the wetlands of the Ghana National Park in Bharatpur are drying up.

The 2007 mobilisation in favour of ST status took the direction of caste animosity between Gujars and Minas who have lived in close—indeed, intimate—relations, striking competitive postures of inclusion/exclusion. Gold describes a monsoon *yatra* to collect teaching materials for a course on India's Religious Worlds. She undertook the journey in the company of Bhoju Ram Gujar, Bali, his wife, and Shiv Lal Mina. The two men, she notes, are both headmasters of rural government schools and share a solid friendship that seems to be grounded in their shared experience as educational professionals who come from largely uneducated farming and herding communities (Gold 2013). Indeed, it is the intimacy of cross-caste relations that led to Gujars asking questions about their own backwardness in contrast to the extraordinary upward mobility of the Minas in the last half century.

As an aspect of the politics of inclusion into statist categories in the aftermath of the formation of the state of Rajasthan, the Minas had been notified ST, but not the Gujars. The Minas had been an erstwhile ruling group of the Amber kingdom, dispossessed by the Rajputs much like the Bhil *rajas* elsewhere in Rajasthan and Gujarat. The Minas own internal categories of difference—the *zamindari* and *chowkidari* Minas—suggest the emergence of a section as part of the (post) Mughal middle peasantry. The Amber/Jaipur kingdom gave the Minas a special ritual status—their vermilion mark anointed the king and they guarded the treasury.

During the colonial period, upward mobility characterised a small section of the north Indian peasantry, including the Jats, who benefitted from the East Yamuna canal. However, most peasant castes and western Jat factions faced an increasingly desperate situation under the pressure of high revenue assessment, famines, and growing indebtedness. Gangs of Gujar, Mina, and Mewati raiders had begun operating by the late-eighteenth century and became particularly active in the early-nineteenth century, which led to the making of the infamous Criminal Tribes Act of 1870-71. The Mer had been domesticated much earlier in the 1820s. The unrest among peasant-pastoral groups such as the Gujars and Mewatis fed into the making of the Revolt of 1857.

The Gujar mobilisation of June 2007 was multi-faceted. It was about legitimate democratic aspirations and citizenship. Gujars contend, for instance, that they contributed significantly to the anti-colonial struggle by mobilising against the *firing* in 1857, a contribution they feel has gone unrecognized.²¹

The current protest is about employment, educational entitlements, and comparative perceptions of inequality. While the Minas have acquired a high representation in the state and all India services, Gujars diversified to mining and construction labour and, at best, minor clerical jobs in the Delhi Development Authority. At its heart is also a critique of an interpretation of economic growth that would seek to prioritize glitzy SEZs, film cities, and emerald, gold, and diamond souks over the rural hinterland's predicament of receding groundwater resources in the face of industrial expansion, shrinking commons, and changing land use,²² livelihood crises, and youth unemployment.

The Gujar protest represents another moment in the transformation of tribe/caste—I deliberately use the oblique that signifies a hyphen here to suggest the liminal status of several groups. Dumont's description of the Indian as *Homo Hierarchus* (1970) in contrast to the western impetus to *homo aequalis* has already been revisited in the work of the Rudolphs (1965, 1967), Dirks (2001), Kothari, and Sheth.²³ Caste is about unequal ritual and social statuses and untouchability, but contemporary caste/tribe claims also represent visions of justice and equality. Thus, while the earlier phase of lower caste assertion had been about displacing upper castes, a good deal of the discourse surrounding caste (and community, in the case of the Muslim

²¹ African American leaders of the Harlem Renaissance in the United States were similarly disheartened when their participation in the World War I only brought them expulsion from unions and lynchings (see Lewis 1994).

²² An example of changing land use can be found in "wastelands" that are now being used, with incentives from the state, to cultivate the wonder crop ratanjot for biodiesel.

²³ DL Sheth, *Problematizing Exclusion: Issues of Theory and Policy*. Seminar, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 2009 (<http://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/5663/>).

Backward Classes) is about challenging the “creamy layers.” Gujar anxieties are shared by Bhils, Ahirs, Malis, and others, principally over the perception that the Minas and Jats, who comprise a new rural middle class, are cornering privileges meant for adivasis and OBCs and that they—the Gujars, Bhils, Ahirs, and Malis—are losing out.

Towards a Conclusion: The Violence of Knowledge

The question raised by the Gujar protest is whether groups such as these constitute a tribe or a caste.²⁴ A large number of groups might more profitably be seen in terms of a liminal status, i.e., as having aspects of both caste and tribe.²⁵

Groups like the Gujars, however, were demonstrating aspects of caste formation in the Mughal and post-Mughal period. There is evidence of the sedentarisation of Gujars in eastern Rajasthan in the sixteenth century. Under the revenue administration, they were considered a *jati* with a *sudra* status (ritually clean but non twice-born low caste) similar to the Minas, Jats, and Ahirs, and as such were liable for heavier revenue dues—up to seventy-six per cent of the produce—while brahmans paid twelve per cent and Rajputs thirty-three per cent. Folkloric sources, however, indicate a more ambivalent pastoral status. In a Mewati folk epic contextualised in the nineteenth century, a poor Gujar woman whose only cow is killed by a tiger weeps in the mountains until she is helped by Meo bandit-rebels!²⁶ Bayly points out that Jats, Gujars, Bhattis, and other groups continued to be nomadic till 1800 or so (1983, 21). Since Gujar settlements were in villages—as in the case of Pathans—tribe was interwoven with caste.²⁷ Even as contemporary Gujars embody difference and are internally stratified, there is a section whose livelihood is dependent on forests and pastures.

This raises larger questions about the categories used by states, both colonial and postcolonial. In the last half decade there has been no review of statist categories. In document after document, state institutions provide no appraisal of the quasi-colonial statist category of Scheduled Tribe, which in effect re-categorises the former Criminal and Nomadic Tribes. Even so recent a document as the Report of the Working Group on Empowerment of Scheduled Tribes (Government of India, 2007)—which is a sympathetic understanding of the tribal plight of exploitation, poverty,

²⁴ Certain scholars emphasise how tribe is a colonial construction (Xaxa 2003), while others view “tribes in transition” (Beteille 1991) and sustain the distinction between caste and tribe. Ratnagar, for instance, views tribes as a mode of social organisation pre-dating class society characterised by the absence of private property, the importance of kinship, and joint ownership of natural resources (2003).

²⁵ Sundar critiques the tribe-caste distinction (1998).

²⁶ For a discussion, see Mayaram 2003, ch 9.

²⁷ On the Pathans see Barth (1959).

deprivation, land-alienation, displacement by development projects, and health and educational backwardness—does not challenge the criteria laid down by the Lokur Committee. This identified tribals by the following markers: indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, and backwardness. Following this, nearly seven hundred tribal communities were listed as scheduled tribes in the 2001 census, seventy-five of which are recognized by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs as belonging to “primitive” tribal groups. The only qualification to these indicators has been made in the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, which summarily notes that some of these criteria are pejorative.²⁸

There is a vast distance between professional anthropology and statist anthropology, despite the many anthropological research institutes in existence. The Anthropological Survey of India under the leadership of K.S. Singh collated phenomenal empirical data but worked within the statist paradigm. Even the comprehensive volume of the Anthropological Survey of India, *The Scheduled Tribes*, does not ask the question, what is a tribe?

In a presentation as part of a panel to the Chopra Committee constituted by the Government of Rajasthan to examine the Gujar demand for ST status, I argued for a national review of the conceptual category of Scheduled Tribe. This means a review of the indices used by parliamentary legislation, governmental committees, and bureaucracy. “Primitive traits” and “shyness of contact” as indexical of tribality draw upon colonial and nineteenth-century anthropology under the influence of evolutionism, racism, and the idea of primitivity meant to demonstrate the superiority of white, western man. Far from “primitive,” the Agaria knew of iron-smelting and metallurgy and were able to build fairly advanced bridges, which amazed colonial conquerors who thought that they had an exclusive prerogative to the scientific temper. As for cultural backwardness, adivasi groups are often ahead of non-advasi in their understanding of nature, its powers and properties, a relationship that is often encoded in their religious cultures (Devi 1998). As Sharma has emphasized, this contrasts with the homo-centrism of the non-tribal (1994). Historically, tribal groups have demonstrated enormous artistic and literary creativity, as the efforts of Mahasweta Devi, J. Swaminathan, and Ganesh Devy have demonstrated, even though mainstream India has seen them as producers of para-art and para-literatures (not quite literature). Their indicators with respect to the girl child, women’s mobility, and sex ratio also tend to be better than caste society.

“Geographical isolation” applies only to rare, miniscule communities. The much larger category of indigenous populations the world over, including inhabitants of

²⁸ Archana Prasad mentioned to me that she had been part of group that recommended to a Select Committee of Parliament the need to revisit the criteria. The recommendation was apparently ignored.

remote rainforests, have been compromised by modernity.²⁹ In the Indian context, tribal groups have been frequently influenced by caste society and many have been demonstrating aspects of caste formation since the nineteenth century. Caste society has also been influenced by forest communities, as Unnithan-Kumar demonstrates in the case of the Girasia (2001).

The crucial question is what is distinctive about Indian tribals and what distinguishes them from indigenous groups of the Americas, Australia, and Africa? Indian forest communities have been part of the constant dialogues that helped constitute Indic civilisation. This is suggested by both epigraphic and literary sources, including the figures of Eklavya, the Bhil from the Mahabharata, and Nishadraj Guhya, King of Nishads, whose occupation is described as the hunting of birds. Sanskrit sources refer to the *aranya* as a space for the sage, renouncer, and the *aranya* (the Sanskrit term for forest-dwellers). Political and trading relations existed between tribal and non-tribal polities.

Forest polities were interacting with states such as the Gujarat Sultanate, the Mughal Empire, the Maratha kingdoms, and the British Empire, and forest folk were integrated into regional political economies (Guha 1999, chs 3, 5). In the Dangs region of Gujarat, Banjara nomads with large herds of pack-bullocks exchanged salt, ornaments, and garments for forest produce with Bhils and Bhats, while Charans often accompanied traders from both groups to provide protection against bandits (Skaria 1999, ch 4). For the Bhils, *moglai* (Mughal rule) was a time of *chhut* (freedom to) and mobility. The Bhil Raj was a polity with sustained relations with the Mughal, Maratha, and Mewar kingdoms. The Marathas developed a pattern of shared sovereignty in which both Bhil and Maratha chiefs collected revenue from villages. The woodland was both a place of refuge and a resource in the longstanding coexistence between forest peoples and peasant settlements, as Guha points out. Bhil-dominated lands were not isolated or archaic, but “deeply integrated into the political economy of medieval India” (Guha 1999, 121). The Bhils used markets for their produce, were employed as military entrepreneurs, and were also diplomats who were given robes of honour and other gifts. There was exchange between forest communities and kingdoms, but also tensions and reprisals between Bhils, Kolis, Gonds, and others (Guha 1999). Occasionally there was an onslaught against them, as when Akbar attacked the Pathans because of the “heretic” Raushanniya, the followers of Bayed, who wanted to perform *namaz* in the vernacular.³⁰

The colonial and postcolonial Indian economy exacerbated the marginality of hunter-gatherers, pastoralists, and forest-dwellers, often transforming them into migrant and

²⁹ Tsing demonstrates this with respect to Indonesian inhabitants of the rainforests (1993).

³⁰ Jit Pal Singh Uberoi. “Guru, Granth and Panth: An Approach to Sikhism.” Lecture in Dialogues of Faith Series, organised by The Attic and India International Centre, Delhi, 9 April 2008.

wage labourers.³¹ The neo-liberal dispensation further threatens peasant and forest communities in its constant thirst for land for industrial townships and extra-sovereign export processing zones.

New indices of backwardness then need to be debated, specified, and concretised. The relation to forests (however depleted and eroded) and nature has been central to tribal cultures. Moreover, tribal peoples manifest strikingly different patterns of kinship and gender relations, although the norms of caste society, unfavourable demographic sex ratios, and dowry practices have been creeping in. Adivasi religious cultures have been substantially different from the brahmanised counterparts of caste society.

“Tribal” and pastoral communities need to be identified as vulnerable, and victims of development, rather than seen in terms of racial and ethnic difference. They have been rendered backward because of the dominant model of development, which emphasises industrialism, capitalism, (non-renewable) resource-consumption, and urbanisation. This might have been avoided in a different, less violent, model of development. But the industrial, communication, and information revolutions, and the penetration of state and capital have reduced the distance between caste and tribe, as the latter become part of the underclass of the postcolonial Indian economy.³² In mega cities, they come to constitute the category “migrant” and “working class,” whether they are from Jharkhand or Bihar.

What is required is a decennial review of the backwardness of tribal/pastoral and OBC groups, for which the state must take responsibility.³³ This decennial review needs to be undertaken in order to evaluate the new claims of groups asserting ST, SC, or OBC status, while also reviewing groups that demonstrate upward mobility and might be adjudged not to require the benefits of reservation. The category of Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs) was added to the Scheduled Tribes by

³¹ Bannerjee has argued that the colonial and postcolonial regimes have historicised and culturalised tribes respectively (2006). Indeed, they have been irreversibly politicised by the many missionaries, Christian, Marxist, Hindutva-oriented, and state reformist.

³² Maya Unnithan-Kumar emphasised that “vulnerability” as a category disconnected from ethnicity, as a means of identifying groups and individuals for state support, may overcome some of the impossibilities (and political hurdles) that stand in the way of having equality and justice for all. As she pointed out to me, the drive toward clear-cut definitions of specific tribal groups is never really free from the politics that surround such processes in the first place and of which the Gujar/Mina are but one example. Personal communication, 30 Sept 2007.

³³ A comprehensive review of state rehabilitation policies with respect to denotified tribes was made by the Bombay State, which then included the areas now called Maharashtra and Gujarat. It instituted the Ex-Criminal Tribes Rehabilitation Committee in 1950 that was author of the Antrolikar Committee Report (see *Budhan* 1998, http://archive.tehelka.com/story_main34.asp?filename=cr201007HATED.asp, accessed on 9 January 2014). The Committee “recommended special facilities to be given to the Ex-Criminal Tribes over and above the facilities given to them as Backward Classes”; other groups not to be given facilities recommended for the ex-Criminal Tribes; and another set of groups “to be made eligible for the facilities recommended for the nomadic tribes.”

the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest) Act 2006.

Finally, there is a need for hard data. The absence of demographic data regarding the backward castes can only generate speculation about proposed numbers since there has been no caste-wise census published after 1931. The census, it is well recognised, is a crucial instrument of the modern state. Internationally, only those states that fear the consequences of ethnic identities hesitate to use it. A confident state interested in doing its best in terms of development and welfare must use the census to benefit others rather than serve its own interests (as was the case with the colonial census).

The “acute deficiency of data, statistics, etc., relating to Scheduled Areas, Tribal Sub Plan areas and scheduled tribes in nearly every sector,” which is a major handicap for planning, is recognized by the Planning Commission Working Group on the Empowerment of STs. The state must be responsible for the collection of data regarding the socio-economic status of tribal, dalit, pastoral, and backward groups. These groups, given their educational backwardness, can under no circumstances be expected to generate reliable data themselves. I state this in the context of the assertion by the Chopra Committee that the Gujars submit proof and evidence, in particular, empirical evidence and socioeconomic data, to support their claims to tribalness. This has led to all kinds of perfectly laughable surveys. It is doubtful whether any kind of authentic data can be generated in this heated moment.

Educational and employment-related data are important, in addition to the ownership of assets and household size. Instruments such as the National Sample Survey can also be used to ascertain per capita income, health, food, and other consumption data. Gender indices and data for children and adolescents are particularly important and need to be collected under specific heads.

The census needs to be used to obtain comprehensive data on caste/tribe political and cultural economies and backwardness. Such a census must not be bowed down by the singularity of identities of the colonial census, but must make it possible for people to identify themselves as bi- and multilingual and religious, and as belonging to more than one caste and tribe or even as belonging to neither. The census must be made an instrument of political society, rather than of the state and governmentality.

However much it acclaims its double-digit growth, contemporary India continues to fail to appreciate the economies of forest peoples and pastoralists. There is little comprehension of the historical interface such people have had with the urban, commercial, and rural peasant economies, with the relations of trade, exchange, and cooperation therein, alongside the increasing hostility between pastoralists and

peasants competing over ecological niches. Even writings from a classical Marxian perspective have tended to iconicise the peasant (read: peasantry of the north Indian plains), without understanding the plural economies of the countryside.³⁴

While there are recognized dalit and Muslim public spheres, the tribal and pastoral public spheres are weak, if not non-existent, co-opted by agents, and suffering from weak tribal/pastoral people's involvement, which is largely due to de-tribalisation and de-pastoralisation, both forced and demi-voluntary, and the exploitation of their own leaders. Apart from Maoist groups, only small activist groups are in existence, such as the Denotified and Nomadic Tribes Rights Action Group, the Jar Jangal and Zameen Movement, and community organisations such as of the Raika and Gujars, including their Mahasabhas and Arakshana Sabhas.³⁵ These tend to be sporadic, fragmentary, NGO-driven and dependent movements.

Caste society is an additional source of violence as it has internalised one hundred and fifty years of the classificatory thinking of the colonial state and the nefarious Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. Frequently, it assumes responsibility for the punishment of persons and groups who are presumed to be "habitual offenders." Groups themselves have internalised colonial categories. The Gujar demand for ST status has involved depositions before the Chopra Committee that they were actually a criminal group, hence deserving of ST status! Other sections have tried to prove the tribal status of Gujars by arguing that they used indigenous medical systems and believed in witches and spirits! Indeed, it is precisely this that suggests the continued overlap and interface between tribe and caste and pastoral and peasant lifeworlds. The larger tragedy of community is that it is trapped in the language of the state. Rather than demanding a comprehensive programme for pastoralists, its imaginary is constrained by the singular demand for reservation.³⁶ Surely both state and community need to recognise that social justice is about much more than reservation.

India needs to debate its model of growth. There are an array of choices: the Australo-American paradigm, which has reduced its indigenous groups to a near-permanent marginal aboriginality; the Chinese model of state-sponsored multicultural growth, which believes that matrilineality, dissenting monks, and students and pastoralists need to be expurgated; the state-driven authoritarian model of

³⁴ Dube cites Charu Mazumdar's account of his address to a meeting of adivasis whom he refers to as peasants (*kisan*) rather than as adivasi (1991: 77-78).

³⁵ The Newsletter of the DNT-RAG (1998) draws its name from Budhan, of the Kheria Sabar community of West Bengal's Purulia District killed in police custody, one of the many thousand pain-bearing myths of adivasi history.

³⁶ In May 2015 as this goes to press, the Gujars have renewed their agitation.

development witnessed in much of south-east Asia. Can India devise a modernity that will tackle more creatively the question of marginality?

References

- Agarwal, Arun. 1999. *Greener Pastures: Politics, Markets and Community Among a Migrant Pastoral People*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Bannerjee, Prathama. 2006. "Culture/Politics: The Irresoluble Double-Bind of the Indian Adivasi." *The Indian Historical Review* 33 (1): 99-126.
- Bayly, Chris. A. 1983. *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barth, Fredrik. 1959. *Political Leadership Among the Swat Pathans*. London: Athlone Press.
- Beteille, Andre. 1991. "The Concept of Tribe with Special Reference to India." In *Society and Politics in India*, ed. Andre Beteille. London: Athlone, 57-78.
- Bhati, Khurshid. 2007. *Āzādī ke bād sāmājīk manyatāon ke ādhar par ārakshan kā itihāsa gurjaron prārambh huā. [After independence the history of reservation began with the Gurjara on the basis of social beliefs]*. Jodhpur: Shyam Printing Press.
- Bingley, A.H. [1899] 1978. *History, Caste and Culture of Jats and Gujars (1899)*. New Delhi: Ess Publications.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Chaudhuri, S. B. 1955. *Civil Disturbances During the British Rule in India (1765-1857)*. Calcutta: World Press.
- Dalrymple, William. 2006. "The Last Mughal and a Clash of Civilisations." *New Statesman* 16 (October).
- Das, Veena. 2003. "Introduction." Vol. 1 of *The Oxford India Companion to Sociology and Social Anthropology*, edited by Veena Das. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1-29.
- Dirks, Nicholas. 2001. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Dube, Abhay Kumar. 1991. *Krāntī kā ātmasangharsh: Naksalvādī āndolan ke badalte chahre kā adhyayan. [The inner conflict of revolution: A study of the changing face of the Naxalite Movement]*. Delhi: Vinay Prakashan.

- Dumont, Louis. 1970. *Homo Hierarchicus: An Essay on the Caste System*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Escobar, Arturo. 2007. "Post-Development' as Concept and Social Practice." In *Exploring Post-Development: Theory, Practice, Problems and Perspectives*, ed. A. Ziai. London and New York: Routledge, 18-31.
- Gadgil, Madhav, and Ramachandra Guha. 1992. *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Gold, Ann G. 2013. "Ainn-Bai's "Sarvadharm Yatra": A Mix of Experiences." In *Lines in Water: Religious Boundaries in South Asia*, eds. T. R. Kassam and S. Ramey. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Gold, Ann G., and Bhoju Ram Gujar. 2002. *In the Time of Trees and Sorrows: Nature, Power, and Memory in Rajasthan*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Gommans, Jos J.L. 1998. "The Silent Frontier of South Asia, c AD 110-1800." *Journal of World History* 9 (1): 1-23.
- Guha, Ranajit. 1983. *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Guha, Sumit. 1999. *Environment and Ethnicity in India 1200-1991*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hiltebeitel, Alf. 1999. *India's Oral and Classical Epics: Draupadi Among the Rajputs, Muslims and Dalits*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. 1969. *Bandits*. New York: Delacorte Press.
- INTACH. 2005. *The Bakkarwals of Jammu and Kashmir*. Delhi: Intach.
- Kavoori, Purnendu. 2005. "Environmentalism, Development and the Crisis of Pastoral Legitimacy: Rajasthan's Nomadic Pastoralists and the Forests of Madhya Pradesh." *Senri Ethnological Studies* 69: 215-226.
- Kavoori, Purnendu. 2007. "Reservation for Gujars: A Pastoral Perspective." *Economic and Political Weekly* 42 (38): 3833-3835.
- Kolff, Dirk. H. A. 1990. *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450-1850*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lewis, D. L., ed. 1994. *The Portable Harlem Reader*. New York: Viking.
- Ludden, David. 1974. "History Outside Civilisation and the Mobility of South Asia." *South Asia* 17 (1):1-23.

- Ludden, David. 2003. "Maps in the Mind and the Mobility of Asia." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62 (4):1057-1078.
- Mahbubani, Kishore. 2008. *The New Asian Hemisphere*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Malik, Aditya. 2004. *Divine Testimony: A Study and Translation of the Rajasthan Oral Narrative of Devnārāyan*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mayaram, Shail. 2003. *Against History, Against State: Counterperspectives from the Margins*. New York and London: Columbia University Press.
- Mayaram, Shail. 2009. *The Other Global City*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Planning Commission of the Government of India. 2007. *Report of the Working Group on Empowerment of Scheduled Tribes for the Eleventh Five Year Plan 2007-2012*.
- People's Union for Civil Liberties-People's Union for Democratic Rights. 2007. "Interim Report on Civil Rights Investigation Into Police Firings on Gurjar Agitation in May-June 2007." Presented at the Press Conference, Jaipur.
- Radhakrishna, Meena. 2001. *Dishonoured by History "Criminal Tribes" and British Colonial Policy*. New Delhi, Orient Longman.
- Rao, Aparna and Michael J. Casimir. 2002. "Nomadism in South Asia: An Introduction." In *Nomadism in South Asia*, eds. Aparna. Rao and Michael J. Casimir. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, Oxford in India, Readings in Sociology, and Cultural Anthropology, 1-38.
- Rao, Aparna and Michael J. Casimir. 2003. "Movements of Peoples; Nomads in India." In Vol. 1 of *The Oxford India Companion to Sociology and Social Anthropology*, ed. V. Das. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 219-261.
- Ratnagar, Shereen. 2003. "Our Tribal Past." *Social Scientist* 31 (1-2): 17-36.
- Rudolph, Lloyd. 1965. "The Modernity of Tradition: The Democratic Incarnation of Caste in India." *American Political Science Review* 59: 975-989.
- Rudolph, Lloyd and S.H. Rudolph. 1967. *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rudolph, Lloyd. 2002. "Producing and Reproducing Rajasthan: Why Col. Tod Represented Rajasthan the Way He Did and Its Consequences for Imperial, Nationalist and Rajput Historiography." In *Culture, Communities and Change*, ed. V. Joshi. Jaipur: Institute of Rajasthan Studies.
- Scott, James. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

- Sharma, Dashrath. 1966. *Rajasthan Through the Ages: A Comprehensive and Authentic History of Rajasthan*. Bikaner: Rajasthan State Archives.
- Sharma, Suresh. 1994. *Tribal Identity and the Modern World*. London: Sage.
- Sheth, D.L. 2004. "Globalisation and the New Politics of Micro-Movements." *Economic and Political Weekly* 39 (1): 45-58.
- Singh, Kumar Suresh. 1983. *Birsa Munda and His Movement 1874-1901: A Study of a Millenarian Movement in Chota Nagpur*. Calcutta: Oxford University Press.
- Skaria, Ajay. 1999. *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India*. Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Smith, John D. 1991. *The Epic of Pabuji: A Study, Transcription and Translation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stokes, Eric. 1978. *The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India*. New Delhi: Vikas.
- Sundar, Nandini. 1998. *Subalterns and Sovereigns: An Anthropological History of Bastar*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sundar, Nandini. 2007. "Civil War in Central India." Presented at the India International Centre, New Delhi.
- Tsing, Anna. 1993. *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-Of-The-Way Place*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Unnithan-Kumar, Maya. 2001. *Identity, Gender and Poverty: New Perspectives on Caste and Tribe*. Jaipur: Rawat.
- Werbner, Pnina. 1990. "Manchester Pakistanis: Division and Unity." In *South Asians Overseas: Migration and Ethnicity*, eds. C. Clarke, C. Peach, and S. Vertovec. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 331-347.
- Xaxa, Virginius. 2003. "Tribes in India." In *The Oxford India Companion to Sociology and Social Anthropology*, ed. V. Das. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 373-408.
- Ziai, Aram. 2007. "Development Discourse and Its Critics: An Introduction to Post-Development." In *Exploring Post-Development: Theory, Practice, Problems and Perspectives*, ed. Aram, Ziai. London and New York: Routledge, 226-234.