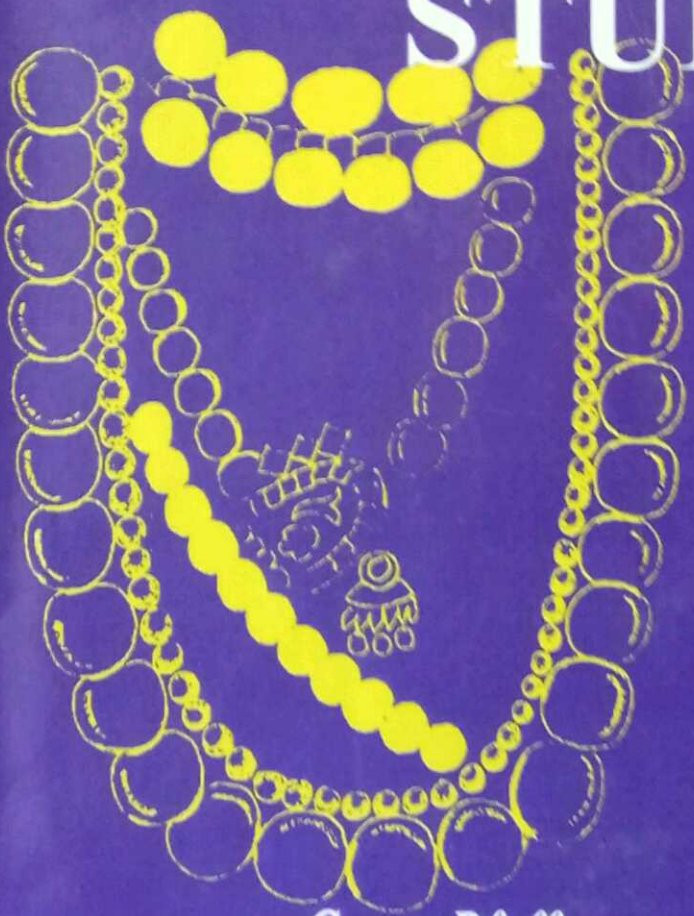
Contemporary Society

TRIBAL STUDIES



Georg Pfeffer

Deepak Kumar Behera

VOLUME FIVE

THE CONCEPT OF TRIBAL SOCIETY

Documentation of various facets of tribal social reality is very much essential before they are totally eclipsed by the rapid process of globalization of the world economy. While examining the current literature on tribal societies we notice a curious absence of scientific studies based on intensive fieldwork among a large and important section of the world population. The series *Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies* tries to fill in this gap and thereby attempts to remove our ignorance on many aspects of tribal world. The ongoing series has already brought out four earlier volumes, namely, (1) ***Structure and Process***, (2) ***Development Issues, Transition and Change***, (3) ***Social Concern*** and (4) ***Social Realities***.

The present volume *The Concept of Tribal Society*, deals with an important issue of defining the tribal society. It points out that the traditional criteria for defining the tribal society are no longer valid in the context of rapid social change and transformation. Thus the concept "Tribal Society" is a flexible one and the contexts of time and space are important considerations for the understanding of such a concept. The volume covers many empirical studies covering tribal people of both South Asia and abroad for a better understanding of the problem of defining "Tribal Society." It becomes essential for the social scientist to formulate the necessary perceptive while dealing with such a definitional problem.

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SECTION II

TRIBAL SOCIETIES ABROAD

INTRODUCTION

GEORG PFEFFER AND DEEPAK KUMAR BEHERA

1. Things Indian

In India the term tribe is widely used and understood, since the constitution reserves special rights for the people classified as *Scheduled Tribes* or *Adivasi* by the President of the Union. In doing so, he is not bound by any criterion of classification. Since the passing of the Constitution in 1950, the Indian parliament is required to renew, alter, or terminate this special status of the *Scheduled Tribes* every ten years with the net result that new entities, e.g. the Badaga of the Nilgiri Hills, have been, or want to be added to the *Schedules* of the Constitution for the sake of benefits in the fields of education, land-rights, government service and parliamentary representation. In 1991 the Census of India counted 67,758,388 individuals as members of the *Scheduled Tribes*[1], i.e. a number exceeding that of the British population.

Over the last 50 years, many Indians and a few Western anthropologists have devoted their attention to problems of these people, relating to some kind of "backwardness" in the fields of health, education, and the economy. In doing so, they have assumed the *Scheduled Tribes* to suffer from certain handicaps when compared to the rest of the Indian population, just as they have seen the need to overcome such disadvantages. This attitude stands for a long tradition. One of the earliest tribal ethnographies, a general overview by a certain Colonel Dalton (1872: 123-138), summarised the chapter on the tribal people of middle India under the heading "broken tribes," indicating some unfortunate historical fate of formerly noble savages. This tradition has been kept up ever since. Unaware of the pride the people themselves express when referring to their tribal status, outsiders, particularly those of little or no local knowledge, tend to look upon the term as some kind of degradation,

1. Our source is the official report of the *Tribal Studies Committee*, 1999: 5.

comparable to "untouchability" in the plains. This attitude has, to our knowledge, never allowed a reversal of the evaluation process. Nobody so far has registered the good life in many tribal communities. "Backwardness" of Western or caste institutions, compared to the tribal conditions of life, has never been discussed. Women's Day, for example, is celebrated with great zeal all over urban India on the first of March every year, but we are unaware of anyone comparing the aspirations of the Indian women's movement to the regular status of tribal women in India.

In the *Scheduled Areas* of the country, i.e. those with a predominant population of *Scheduled Tribes*, anthropologists have very often assumed the roles of social workers, the list of their published recommendations being long. As academics they entertain a precarious relationship with the administrators, or the personnel to implement those suggestions for the better. The administrative staffs frequently offer technical help and supervision of anthropological research in the area considered to be "remote" in the eyes of the plains people. Having succeeded the colonial rulers, the foresters, policemen and revenue officers — all over the country — are responsible for practical decision-making. In the *Scheduled Areas* their power of command coincides with a cultural distance which is evident to all, but publicised by very few. It is, to mention just a single illustration, self-understood that officials, touring villages and outposts in the hills, are entertained with chicken and liquor "requisitioned" from the local population, e.g. the inhabitants of the starvation-struck tribal districts of Kalahandi, Kondhmals and Koraput. These fringe benefits of public service do not arise in those districts where the so-called "mainstream of Indian culture" and the public servants themselves are at home, or the kind of cultural, social, and economic order viewed as the ultimate goal of a policy called "tribal uplift".

In addition to the all-Indian administrative concept of *Scheduled Tribes*, provincial governments have further qualified some of the former. Thus the government of Orissa classified twelve as *Primitive Tribes*.[2] The first important consequence of such specifications seems to be the general confusion of administrative and anthropological concepts of tribe and tribal society, in use since centuries and — for decades — under severe criticism within the anthropological community. So far, we are unaware of any Indian publication differentiating the academic and the governmental terminology. A second consequence of the bureaucratic classification is an ideological reassurance, granted to the administrating lords of the land and, in fact, to most other outsiders in the *Scheduled Areas* including anthropologists. The concept of *Primitive Tribe* is associated with the idea of a definite "primitiveness," not

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2. Government of Orissa, 1994; *Tribal Education in Orissa in the Context of Education for All by 2000 AD.* Tribal Welfare Department Publication.

contained in the neutral word "schedule".[3] Anyone is left to define for himself or herself the domain of such primitive conditions. Since ordinary people anywhere in the world fail to differentiate the value of institutions, structures, cultures, or individuals, the outcome is evident. Furthermore the neutral term *Scheduled Tribes* too is almost automatically associated with "backwardness" meaning little more than inferior status within the general society of *homo hierarchicus*.

Such implicit meanings are, however, not restricted to things Indian. In Russia, China, Canada and Brazil, to name just a few huge countries like India and leave out innumerable other examples, ethnic minorities have been dressed up in administrative terms such as "nationalities" or "first nations" in order to receive certain practical advantages coinciding with a general, if unwritten, discrimination of their cultural logic. Similarly, the anthropologists of these countries have been unable to disentangle themselves from the prerogatives of governmental institutions, even if they have opposed public policy.

Because of these ambiguities involving those people all over the world who used to be called tribes by anthropologists, the time has come for yet another review of the concepts of "tribe" and "tribal" society, irrespective of the pushes and pulls in the administrative domain. Perhaps the anthropological concept of tribe cannot be divorced from the growing influence of state institutions as such, but it can certainly be separated from the particular policies of particular states. Initially we should realise how the idea of the tribe was associated with and dependent upon certain schools of anthropological theory.

2. Functionalism

Anglo-Saxon literature has undoubtedly created the contours of social anthropology by supplying numerous well-known monographs concerned with tribal societies such as the classic on *The Tiv of Central Nigeria* by Laura and Paul Bohannan (1953). These societies were always located in lands ruled either by anglophone settlers, e.g. Australia and the United States, or by colonial governments in countries of Africa and Oceania. Amazingly India, one of the earliest and most important colonies of the British empire, was — during colonial times — almost completely ignored by the young academic discipline. Research in the Indian tribal areas was left to the administrators involved in "Census Ethnography". Philanthropical amateurs such as Sarat Chandra Roy, Verrier Elwin and Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, famous for their descriptive ethnographies, remained academic

3. This terminological neutrality must have been the reason for introducing the new designation *Scheduled Tribes* in favour of numerous 19th century remnants - including *Primitive Tribes* - in the course of the general administrative reforms of 1936.

outsiders and played absolutely no role in the theoretical or methodological development of the discipline. After independence this limitation was overcome with regard to caste society. Indian anthropologists are among the most far-sighted thinkers of the discipline. Students of tribal society, however, have continued to work in close association with the administrative apparatus. Anthropological research as such is next to impossible in the tribal areas, to this day, unless justified by some humanitarian "noble cause".

African studies — implying the concept of the tribe — undoubtedly dominated the field of social anthropology in the formative decades of the discipline. The generalisations of specific monographs were published since 1874 in a neat textbook called *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* written by the leading scholars assembled in *A Committee of the Royal Anthropological Institution* of Britain. The latest edition of 1951, frequently reprinted in the subsequent decades, offers the standard definition: "*A tribe may be defined as a politically or socially coherent and autonomous group occupying or claiming a particular territory*" (1951: 66 emphasis original). Furthermore the concept of tribal society was undoubtedly illustrated by professional accounts of a good number of tribes in anthropological classics such as *African Political Systems* of 1940[4] and *Tribes Without Rulers* of 1958[5], or Max Gluckman's *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society* of 1965, re-edited in 1982.

The latter author also indicated the important social changes since the nineteen-fifties. For him the term tribe referred to a political system in rural areas "based on...economic and social needs," while the "tribalism" of the towns was a recent development promoted by labour officers and other well-meaning but inept administrators (Gluckman, 1961: 55). Witnessing the political independence of most African states in the subsequent years, scholars of the functionalist school were keen to indicate the demise of tribal society in books named *From Tribe to Nation in Africa*[6] or *The Passing of Tribal Man in Africa*.[7] Among the many authors of this trend, Aidan Southall was perhaps the most outspoken, defining tribal society as

> "a whole society with a high degree of self-sufficiency at a near subsistence level, based on relatively simple technology without writing or literature, politically autonomous and with its own distinctive language, culture and sense of identity, tribal religion being co-terminus with tribal society" (Southall, 1970: 28).

As an unavoidable consequence, this author then pointed out that "no tribal society which has lost its political autonomy can continue to be a tribal

4. The editors were M. Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1940).
5. The editors were J. Middleton and D. Tait.
6. The editors were R. Cohen and J. Middleton (Scranton, Chandler).
7. Edited by Peter C. Gutkind.

society in the full sense of the term, although many of its members may retain vivid and even nostalgic memories of its former full existence." Given these conditions, "they can only exist in dwindling pockets so remote..." (Southall, 1970: 29). Similar statements followed in numerous other publications until the nineteen-nineties, being also sceptical of the religious autonomy of the tribe (e.g. Ranger, 1993: 69).

All of these functionalist ethnographies of the tribe, as well as the later conclusions on the vanishing of the former subject of the discipline, were, of course, dependent upon substantialist definitions. They suffered from the defects of any "ethnic unit classification," as proposed by Naroll (1964) in an attempt to pin down the boundaries of substantial entities in anthropological research by criteria like a common territory, political organisation, and language.

As early as 1954 Edmund Leach had rebuked this kind of an approach to tribal society, as well as demarcations of the *Notes and Queries* type. "The concept of 'tribe' is of quite negative utility from the viewpoint of social analysis" (1954: XV), he wrote with reference to the complex whole of people inhabiting north-western Burma and Nagaland. He also noticed how several different languages were spoken by people involved in the same political and ideological systems. Consequently he dispatched the linguistic fallacy into the dustbin (1954: 45). The criterion of a common language as the marker of a cultural unit had, of course, much earlier been discarded by Boas[8] (1911: 139), but works of the father of American cultural anthropology had never belonged to the standard literature in British social anthropology. Perhaps the latest and most impressive testimony against the confusion of linguistic and socio-cultural criteria of tribal societies is Christine Hugh-Jones' brilliant book on the Tukano in the eastern Amazon riverian system of South America. Marriage among these longhouse-dwellers implies husband and wife to belong to different linguistisc units (1979: 17).

All functionalist attempts to devise several substantial criteria of membership, such as joint territory, language and political autonomy, in order to describe an ethnic entity[9] of tribal or non-tribal people have always been bound to fail, because evident exceptions were always at hand. It follows that the accounts of the passing of tribal society were equally fallacious, since they were dependent upon the very same untenable criteria in a prior existence of the people. In fact the functionalist logic was closely tied to political convictions. The ethnographers, women and men of great competence and integrity, had identified themselves with tribal people at a time when racist ideologies dominated much of Europe. They had also supported the independence movement and conceived nations of "new Africa," supposedly of the same content as the European nations. The concerns of these

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8. *The mind of primitive man.* New York: Macmillan.
9. For the sake of brevity, we avoid the debate differentiating "groups" and "categorie".

anthropologists had always been directed towards the functional relationships between institutional establishments. If the latter meant state, church and industry, tribal society was supposed to vanish in favour of arrangements very much like the well-known nations of Europe. Any other development did not accord with the standards of political correctness. The others were to become like the own.

3. Evolutionism

Nineteenth century evolutionists had devised the scheme of a "primitive society" eventually to be transformed into a "civilisation"[10] through several stages of social evolution (Morgan, 1877: 12-13). In the famous phrase of Henry Sumner Maine, "the movement of the progressive societies has hitherto been a movement *from Status to Contract*" (1864: 165 emphasis original). Following the lead of these founding fathers of the discipline, the idea of a "general evolution" of societal types was rediscovered by Leslie White in 1959[11] and refined by several of his students in the nineteen-sixties. The ensuing debates were not without controversies regarding the nature of particular stages within such a typological sequence. Morton Fried (1967) tried to offer a coherent scheme of typological categories and, in the course of this endeavour, argued against his friends Service and Sahlins by seeing no "theoretical need for a tribal stage in the evolution of political organisation. Such a stage reveals nothing but does divert attention from the more important questions: how does ranking begin and how does it catalyse societies" (1966: 539).

Fried's evolutionary sequence was coherent, because it was concerned with a single criterion, ranking, or political and economic power. As is the case with modern north American school children, ranking sets in at an early age with the selection of the school and later continues to dominate the worlds of sororities and dating, housewives and professionals, clubs and stock exchanges, armed forces and universities. Fried, in other words, considered the dominant value of his own contemporary society[12] as the relevant guideline for grading human social evolution. The least ranked represented the earliest, those with the most elaborate and stringent form of ranking the latest stage.

Thus Fried's was an evolution of growing social inequality. In the course of his project, he found an initial stage of "simple egalitarian societies," consisting of bands involved in palaeolithic hunting and gathering, bound together by a reciprocal economy. They were followed in the next stage by "rank societies" whose members raised domestic plants and animals within

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10. For the intellectual history see Kuper, 1988.
11. *The evolution of culture.* New York, McGraw-Hill.
12. Ranking is, of course, equally important in non-Western societies such as the Indian one.

a general economic order of redistribution and pooling. In the third stage of "stratified societies," equal access to the basic resources of life was no longer guarantied, and in the final one of "the state," Fried would observe "a collection of specialised institutions and agencies, some formal and others informal, that maintains an order of stratification" (1967: 235).

While Fried's evolutionary scheme neatly followed the central issue of Western ideology, his fellow evolutionists proposed stages roughly along the same lines under the headings of "hunters", "tribesmen", "peasants" and "the state".[13] When it came to "tribal" society, however, Sahlins offered a note of dissent by directing our attention to essential structural variations. As usual, he pointed to the differences between hunting and gathering bands in the preceding stage and the state in the succeeding typological formation, but "*food collectors*" (emphasis original) might also be called tribal, if they had undergone "a complicated development of clans and chiefs" (Sahlins, 1968: 3). Thus neither the modes of production, nor the degree of socio-political power alone were sufficient criteria to identify this stage. The significant aspect of the tribe was its multiplex organisation.

> "It lacks an independent economic sector or a separate religious organisation, let alone a special political mechanism. In a tribe, these are not so much different institutions as they are different functions of the same institutions" (Sahlins, 1968: 15).

For Sahlins, anthropological wisdom suggests us to abandon the conventional analysis of distinct economic, social-political, and ideological spheres, when it comes to tribes. "The tribal structure is generalised; in this lies its primitiveness" (ibid.).

4. Structuralism

Sahlins view of 1968 seems to indicate a shift, to become more obvious in his later career, away from the sole concern with cultural ecology and the development or the typology of political economies. In his book on "tribesmen" (1968), the relational patterns of a particular cultural logic gain a certain independence of the ecological and productive forces, then still very much the subject of this author. This shift must have come under the initial influence of Claude Lévi-Strauss who had earlier discussed "The Scope of Anthropology".[14]

The latter essay contains many jewels, especially the reference to the specifics of the anthropological approach in contrast to sociology, social

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13. Marshall Sahlins was the editor of the most significant 'Foundations of Modern Anthropology Series' comprising books of Service (1966), Sahlins (1968), Wolf (1966) and Krader (1968) under these titles.
14. In 1960, this was his inaugural address to the College de France, the most eminent academic insitution of that country. It was initially published in *Current Anthropology*.

psychology and other particular sciences (Lévi-Strauss, 1973: 14). Today many of us, trained and preoccupied by a logic of the political economy, tend to ignore the cultural priorities, so the anthropological basics of the French school might as well be remembered for a moment: "The social facts which we study are manifested in societies, each of which is *a total, concrete, and cohesive entity*" (ibid. emphasis original). Later Dumont, in the same vain, saw "*our own modern culture and society as one particular form of humanity*" (1986: 205/6 emphasis original) and as different from "nonmodern societies" (ibid.). The message of these statements does, of course, criticise our[15] tendency to ignore other "forms of humanity," or the particular nature of other "cohesive entities," by applying the social categories — and their particular relational patterns — of our own cultural logic in the course of our anthropological analysis. This widespread tendency has been called sociocentrism by Dumont. It is also found in all political quarters of those who equate the development of administrative systems to the welfare of humanity.

Dumont's term "nonmodern society" appears to be a somewhat defensive phrasing. He opposes it to "traditional societies" like the Indian order of caste, and to the modern Western social type. Mary Douglas is more explicit in stressing "the relevance of tribal studies" (1975) and Lévi-Strauss offers a new terminology. He does talk about "so-called primitive societies" when he views their past being as old as ours, "since it goes back to the origin of the species" (1973: 28). His own phrasing makes use of the term "cold" societies. The distinction to "hot" or dynamic ones is "mainly theoretical, for there is probably no concrete society which, in its whole as well as in its components, corresponds exactly to either type" (1973: 29).

This clear rejection of substantialist definitions takes us to his central concern which is in agreement with Sahlins concept of the tribe: "Of course, so-called primitive societies belong in history" Lévi-Strauss is eager to insist: "Over thousands of years, they have undergone all sorts of transformations, gone through periods of crisis and prosperity....But they have specialised in ways different from those we have chosen" (1973: 28). The significant aspect of cold or tribal societies is that they

> "seem to have developed or retained a particular wisdom which impels them to resist desperately any modification in their structure that would enable history to burst into their midst" (ibid.).

Other authors, concerned with the cosmos of tribal religion, have similarly indicated the tribal endeavour to "take shelter from the terror of history" (Eliade, 1954: 159).

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15. The term "our" may refer to the sociocentric bias of Europeans, Indians, Chinese or anyone else.

This lead, which to us is the only acceptable course, will make us abandon all substantialist efforts to conceive definitive boundaries of a human assembly called tribe, just as we will have to abandon the idea of such tribes uniting as nations with the introduction of the administrative institutions of the modern state. Western arrogance, convinced of an evolutionary concept with Western individualism at the top of the ladder of social development, should be relegated to the cabinets of nineteenth century armchair anthropologists and nowhere else.

The biased reasoning of the evolutionist concept is not dissimilar to the functionalist fallacy. Both take the priority of the political economy as self-understood, i.e. the power of the administrated economy to determine the world of ideas and values. In the footsteps of Western commonsense, the ideology of a people is conceived as a necessary consequence of events in the domain of production and as an insignificant prime mover. If such a general opinion has been relativised occasionally, e.g. by the Weberian thesis on Protestant ethics[16] or by the undeniable experience of an immortal caste system, reservations vanish when it comes to people without temples, shops and armies, organised along the lines of kinship within a subsistence economy. How could their institutions resist the onslaught of hydroelectric dams and steel mills, missionaries and schools, general elections and development aid, anthropologists and tourists?

If we understand Lévi-Strauss or Sahlins correctly, the very simplicity of these institutions, their generalised structure, is the source of the power to resist the forces of history. There being little to undo, little can be undone. The structural primitiveness is the strength of tribal concept of the world.

Such an institutional lack of differentiation regularly goes together with a superb degree of individual competence. Any fieldworker can testify this inverse relationship in primitive society, because most of us, equipped with considerable financial resources, have found it difficult to join the life in the mud huts of the forest fully over an extended period of time, whereas the people we call tribal could demonstrate their power to survive without a regular income, even if the promised salaries were not paid, the crops failed or the water had been poisoned by the nearby factory, the monument of development. The primitiveness of the tribal structure goes together with all-round individual skills and a complex world of religion,[17] normally beyond the reach of those used to writing and other "stores" of cosmological interpretations.

.16. See Weber, Max 1920; die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus. *In* Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsatze zur Religionsoziologie,* Tubingen, Mohr.

17. The best study of the religion of an Indian tribe is that of Vitebsky (1993).

6. The Past, the Present and the Future of Tribal Society

There has never been a pristine tribal society. Wolf (1982) has shown convincingly, how all peoples of the world have at times immigrated into their land and mixed with locals, adopted cultural traits from far away places and succumbed to foreign powers by the latter's direct or indirect interventions. This author has, however, ignored the amazing fact that cultural differences remained in spite of such a general subjection to the forces of history. "If the indigenous peoples were not without history, it was because they were not without culture — which is also why their modern histories have differed" (Sahlins, 1999: xii).

Culture is the key term. Anthropologists can make two elementary mistakes. One is to assume that humans of another land are different from themselves. They are not. They belong to the same species and are endowed with the same human qualities. The second basic mistake is to assume that the cultural logic or the value-ideas of others should be the same as the own, provided certain socio-economic institutions are adjusted or a certain stage of social evolution has been reached. Moral priorities and classifications of the world vary from one society to the next. Cultures differ. Cultures can, for example, go together with "hot" societies to experience a vast variety of transformations, or with "cold" societies resisting such trends.

In a seminal essay on anthropological enlightenment, Sahlins has recently shown that "the surviving victims of imperial capitalism neither became all alike nor just like us". Without belittling their hardships, he has shown that "surviving indigenous peoples aim to take cultural responsibility for what has been done to them" (1999: i). His essay argues against a widespread "sentimental pessimism," or "the encompassment of other people's lives in global visions of Western domination" (1999: vi). Observing an "indigenisation of modernity" Sahlins shows how North American hunters and gatherers continue to live by hunting and gathering. They still adhere to their subsistence economy, even if such stubbornness implies the joint purchase of "subsistence airplanes" (1999: xv). His essay is a denial of the received anthropological clichés opposing tradition and change, indigenous culture and modernity or tribesmen and townsmen. If he knew India, he might have added the opposition of "backwardness" and "uplift".

In the past, the globe was not inhabited by peoples without history, but by peoples of different cultures. A standard illustration refers to the Chinese who mostly avoid eating milk or milk products, but do consume beef, while the Indians mostly avoid beef, but certainly like to consume milk and milk products. Such differences, essential for the concerned cultures, have marked the past, are observed in the present and will rule in future.

The human condition is determined by cultural variability. Societies of hunters and gatherers, or tribal societies, are likely to retain their cultural particularities or recombine them in a new context, as they have done in the

past, even if external conditions will change drastically. The culture of caste has given innumerable illustrations of such adaptability. Thus non-resident Indians, living in the USA in the fourth generation, would continue to prefer "decent marriages" and find the adequate spouses via internet rather than follow the Western style of "love marriage". Another example takes us to the island of Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh where the government has established a space research station since 1971 launching satellites on rockets. The local population of the hunting and gathering Yanadi was evacuated and provided with farms on the mainland. Like tens of thousands of other Yanadis, however, the new farmers refused to subject themselves to the rule of the plough and trickled back to their old environment and old lives on the island in the course of two decades, developing a viable coexistence with the space research staff (Rao, 1991).

If the criticising "sentimental pessimism" is overdue, this is not to deny the past and present suffering of people ill-equipped to resist superior weapons or superior administrations. Atrocities against those citizens of the state who form a cultural minority are likely to continue, even if tribes or bands, commanding a good amount of experience, are likely to find better ways to cope with setbacks than drop-outs within the majority culture. The reasons for a more optimistic attitude refer to the phenomenon called "globalisation," usually conceived as the death-bell of tribal independence. Ulf Hannerz has pointed to the newly emerging world culture, "marked by an organisation of diversity rather than a replication of uniformity" (1990: 237). Sahlins has called it "a Culture of cultures" (1999: x) in which generalised structures like those of tribes are likely to be assets rather than liabilities.

7. Contributions to This Volume

In the present volume, the articles of Part I deal with South Asia. They indicate a general pattern, which — in Nepal — has been neatly adjusted to the organisation of the modern state. Gaenszle's contribution offers an historical overview of the Kiranti people there indicating complex changes in the course of history. In spite of these transformations, the proud tribal people have retained a distinct life world of their own, characterised by two fundamental traits: the idiom of kinship and the bond to ancestral land and territory. Gaenszle also describes the order of the house which, as everywhere in the tribal north, northeast and middle of the subcontinent, comprises the fundamental economic and social unit and, often ignored, the symbolic structure reflecting major cosmological ideas and values.

Berger's research leads to the large (old) Koraput District of Orissa, which is characterised by a tribal majority. He shows that the local society, known to differ sharply from immigrant caste people of the plains, contains a good number of segments not belonging to the administrative category of

Scheduled Tribes. Some, but not all of them, enjoy the advantages of another sort of bureaucratic status, while all interact closely in social, economic, and ritual affairs in spite of the fact that they follow different callings and frequent a number of languages of the three major Indian linguistic families.

One of these non-scheduled groups is being described at length in Hadders' article, concerned with the Jādopaṭiās in West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. They perform priestly services for the Santal, a major Indian tribe counting some five million members. Within the twelve clans of the latter, the second one called *Murmu* used to be equated with the priestly functions in the past, particularly the *nij* or "original" *Murmu* local line in every village. Hadders describes how today outsiders have been integrated in this position with particular regard to the funeral rites and the communication with the dead, a degraded status in the Hindu context. The officiants speak both Santali and Bengali. By their empathetic skill and their extensive knowledge of the Santal world they have obtained considerable influence upon the tribal culture.

Van Schendel and Balz, working in both parts of Bengal, point to the colonial heritage of past sociological classifications and the elusive character of what might be considered tribal or indigenous. Their examples show clearly how any substantialist definition of the tribe is bound to be unworkable and how some are highly problematic. While the racism and the substantialism of Census Ethnography has been overcome with regard to caste in innumerable works on *jati* and *varna* during the last decades, modern South Asian social anthropologists tend to avoid debating the problems related to the concept of tribe. In our opinion, this gap may be explained by the lack of long-term field research in tribal societies and by the linguistic proximity of most ethnographers who command the regional *lingua franca* and thus tend to gloss over the cultural differences. East Bengal may have, after the evacuation of the great bulk of upper-caste Hindus, become culturally more homogeneous, or a society defined by cleavages of class, and yet there are these "other people" of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, outsiders for all Bengalis. Definitions of cultural boundaries have always been problematic. Communities of a cultural minority, disreputable in the eyes of the majority, have always and all over the world been in search for a label without the discriminatory meaning — mostly without much success. Such a label may refer to the naming practices of in-groups or out-groups, to the designations of the state or the political parties, and to academic considerations. If they overlap, the intentions of the users should be clarified, since any intellectual compromise is bound to lead to new problems.

Part of the distinctive cultural logic conceived by the millions of Santal, when compared to the general Hindu world-view, is the conception of time as elaborated in Carrin's article. She follows Bloch's suggestion (1998) to differentiate the semantic and the episodic past, or events of the past aiming

to organise and transmit knowledge and the autobiographical memory, tinged with emotion. Thus Carrin takes up an anthropological tradition initiated by Evans-Pritchard's discussion of "ecological time" (1940: 100) when she is describing the temporality of work and seasons among the Santal, known as the "cattle-clock" among the Nuer. The world of the Santal Bongas, or transcendental beings, by contrast is involving the spacing of generations, provided the funerals have been performed correctly. Like the Australian *dreaming*, the transcendental cosmos of the Bongas is at once the past, the present and the future. Death, if experienced in proper order, implies the regeneration of life, while an unfinished person, like a woman who dies before marriage, becomes a Hinduised kind of malevolent spirit. Like the other middle Indian tribes, the Santal see themselves as *hor hopon*, or humans, a species different from the *diku*, or non-tribal outsiders who have always been known, but known as a different kind.

Trawick is among the few contributors who are native speakers of the English language. The literary style of her article is able to convey a tremendous sensitivity. It is adequately relating to her subject, the songs of the Villi of Tamil Nadu. Their themes are as heterogeneous as grief or politics, love or the ethnographer. After having spent longer periods in an Indian tribal village, most anthropologists will have experienced composition and performance of songs as a specific female medium of emotion and critique. They will be amazed over the versatile techniques employed during the singing. Trawick has the distinction to write about members of a category on the margin of caste society, called "Bowmen" in the present case, and not so different from the Vagri (see Werth, 1996) and other tribes of India who used to be branded as "Criminal Tribes" in colonial times and were then locked up in camps. All over the subcontinent they catch and charm snakes or operate as roadside dentists and medical consultants or let animals perform. The Villi may have been hunter-gatherers in the past, since they operate as foragers in the present. All urban life in India, both of the south and the north, would be unthinkable — and perhaps unbearable — without these foragers, as experienced thirty years ago, when Pfeffer (1970) studied the moiety-organisation of the vagrant Sansi in the Punjab and their relative hierarchical superiority in relation to the foraging urban Gaggera and some ten other small vagrant tribes, the so-called tent-dwellers or *pakkiwas*.

The outstanding trait the Sansi claim for themselves is their "wildness". We are particularly grateful to Tambs-Lyche for discussing "wildness" and militancy as an all-Indian value-idea, linking many tribes — such as those of the Dangs in south Gujarat — with the life-style of the Rajput rulers in western India and many other middle or upper castes of the subcontinent. Following Dumezil he is also relating them to the peoples in the epics of his home in northern Europe. Tambs-Lyche is thus able to avoid the usual stereotype of classification, linking tribes with "savage" characteristics and

Hindus with civilised order. What is described as "heroic masculinity" may belong to the tradition of both, as opposed to the Brahmin/Bania virtues of vegetarianism and restraint or to the evidently gentle bearing, which is self-understood for many tribal people. Not just in western India but also all over the subcontinent the point is applicable that "wildness" is an integral part of the whole political order, as the great wars of the Hindu epics indicate or any observer can confirm who has witnessed a modern general election in the countryside.

Apart from an excellent overview of the history of Gujarat, involving tribe-king alliances, Tambs-Lyche's article implicitly refers to a major borderline within the category of *Scheduled Tribes* which can be traced in that region for South Asia: In Gujarat it is dividing the pastoral tribes, such as the Rabari, and the cultivators, such as the Bhil. After extensive fieldwork in middle India, we think that Bhil and other tribes further east display a somewhat negligent attitude, when it comes to raising and herding cattle, while the cultivation of land — whether terraced, rain-fed, or swidden — is the core of their productive activities. Further to the south of Gujarat, however, or to the west and north, pastoralism defines the mode of production of the tribes, as it does in neighbouring Pakistan, or in Afghanistan and the Muslim countries further to the northwest.

A general comparison is the theme of Pfeffer's contribution, referring to social structure rather than the economic domain. He discusses aspects of the structural set-up in various formations within the middle Indian tribes and compares them in South Asian and African, Middle-Eastern and Polynesian tribal societies, as known from the anthropological literature. Also indicated are the elementary structural differences between tribes and such major castes as the Jat of northern India or bureaucratic organisations like that of a western European state.

The final contribution to Part I on South Asia is Demmer's article on the foraging Jénu Kuɹumba of southern India. These hunters and gatherers are included in this volume as a deliberate structural contrast. Unlike the tribes, they lack lineages or other decent groups and categories that might define them in formal or corporate units. On a first look their social formation exhibits a considerable degree of flexibility and fluidity. Having spent about four years in a Jénu Kuɹumba community, Demmer is, however, in a position to decipher relational patterns of this society and confirm other studies of south Indian hunter-gatherers stressing the paramount importance of social relatedness. The social praxis, the personified relational patterns observed by the ethnographer, reveal the general constitution. Demmer takes a look at the interpersonal relationships, the daily and the ritual links between kin, the structure of the camps for economic purposes and the details of the death ritual. It should also be clear that the south Indian foraging groups — like the tribes — are not and may never have been isolated from the rest of Indian

society. They have their own view of the "outside world". As against popular stereotypes, the structural wealth of this "simple society" will be the lasting impression of this report.

In Part II of the volume the reader is introduced to comparable situations. Regarding the tribal societies beyond South Asia, Glatzer's introduction to the Pashtun tribal system deals with a West Asian pattern, even if about half of the Pashtun people do not live in Afghanistan but in the two western provinces of Pakistan, a part of South Asia. As in India, Pashtuns are proud of their tribal status. Belonging to a tribe is equivalent to being dependable and genuine. The former kings and the religious and political leaders of the countries highlight their tribal background, just as urban intellectuals are sure to refer to their tribal belonging. As is suitable for the West Asian pattern, Glatzer defines the tribe as a social segment based on a genealogical concept of social structure. We find the best example of such a concept in the Bible's *Book of Genesis* where Adam's tribe is introduced along with several subtribes or lineages. Tribe, for this author, is a structural concept of social order and not the description of a substantial mass of people. Glatzer shows how the idea has survived the Soviet invasion and the recent civil war in Afghanistan.

The genealogical criteria would, of course, apply to major north Indian castes (Rajput, Jat) as well, but the latter — in contrast to the Pashtuns — must observe the rule of exogamy among unilineal descent categories and castes are very much "part-societies" — one among many — depending upon the division of labour, ritual and armed services of the system as a whole. Such a division may, to a minor extent, be observed in tribal or other societies as well, but it will not be the core-value or the precondition of economic, socio-political, and religious life, as it is in the order of caste. If we keep in mind that middle Indian tribes lack genealogical concepts, and if we wish to speculate in terms of conquest theories, we might conceive — following the path of Sanskrit traditions — genealogically structured tribes coming out of West and Central Asia — perhaps as pastoralists — subjugating the indigenous tribal cultivators who are organised without such genealogical strictures. The conquerors, as upper castes, might then also retain their pre-eminence by linking their elaborate pedigree to Rama or Krishna, as is the case among the major Rajput descent categories. Such speculations should, of course, by no means pave the way to a new fashion of conjectural history. They should simply indicate how partial structural overlapping of different societal types might have come about.

Braukämper's paper on the Bedouin leads to the classical West Asian and North African example of tribal society. Economically, the Bedouin are seen as Arabic (sometimes non-Arabic as well) nomadic herders of sheep, goats, and camels in opposition to sedentary peasants on the one hand and citizens of the urban centres on the other. The author offers an excellent

description of the Bedouin habitat and of the evolution of Bedouin culture, which can be traced back to the 10th millennium BC. They have never lived in an isolated world of their own, but always maintained intensive relations with town-dwellers and peasants, or producers of vegetarian food. Thus some of them have supported and others have rejected the rise of the Prophet of Islam. Some political or religious leaders of the Arab world have — in the past and in the present — adhered to the modest life of the desert people. As a specialist of the Middle-Eastern ecology and traditional economy the author gives us a comprehensive and vivid description of a free and proud people, their life-cycle and their socio-political organisation and their value-ideas, such as the central concept of hospitality. He also points to recent social changes under the drastic conditions of a global oil market.

Shashahani's article discusses a central theme of such change, the use and abuse of educational programmes. She is concerned with nomads like the Bedouins, with periodically moving pastorlists of Iran where these tribes form a major section of the population. Her first-hand experience was gained among the Mamassani, a segment of the great Lor people who, like so many others, had been exposed to the "mobile schools" introduced by the government in the nineteen-fifties with the massive support of the United States of America. Shashahani rightly begins with the observation that nobody in Iran had ever undertaken research on the indigenous system of nomad education, and yet the bulk of anthropologists would do fieldwork in tribal Iran with "modernising" intentions. The mobile school system was in reality a manipulative strategy of sedentarisation. In the words of Paulo Freire (1970), the author calls it an undertaking of "oppressive pedagogy". The white tents of canvas, provided by the USA for the schools, were seen next to the black tents of goathair, the symbol of nomad independence between Pakistan and Morocco. The modernisers' effort was part of a cold war scheme to stabilise the Shah's regime and to keep communism out of the oil-rich countries. Like many efforts of "tribal education" all over the world, the modernisers were naive at best. Tribal youths who had been lured into the programme by pictures of "the educated" as doctors or teachers found themselves unemployed at the end of their school career and denounced as "lazy". As can be seen elsewhere on the globe, they were also unable to follow the traditional pursuits of the parents and were apt to ridicule elders and those who — like many women — had retained their native tribal language being less exposed to Persian. Many of the students continued to feel inferior because fluent Persian was never mastered. Significant for the tribal world in general may be Shashahani's following reference to Freire: "For cultural invasion to succeed, it is essential that those invaded become convinced of their intrinsic inferiority" (1970: 151).

Social change is also a topic of Tanner's contribution on East Africa. He is convincingly rejecting the simplistic dichotomy of townsmen and tribesmen,

since — as elsewhere — individuals are on the move between the rural and the expanding urban areas. Just as Sahlins (1999: xix) has recently differentiated the social and the geographical village, Tanner points to the commuters of whom few are permanently committed to towns. His primary concern is the religion of the quasi-traditional type which, like Christianity and Islam in East Africa, includes "all activities related to or directed at metaphysical realities". Such religious practices, just as the social ones, are seen under conditions of virtually permanent dispersal. Thus a certain cult changes sharply within a period of a decade or, for example, between the region to the north of Lake Victoria and that in the south. Religious ideas and practices focus on individuals and their families, on the rites of passage and on reactions to problems experienced. The inherited religious and social paradigm does not indicate the path towards centralising and centralised religions. The basis of social segmentation is competition. Independent Christian and quasi-traditional religious leaders are in covert competition with each other within their ostensible commitment to spirituality. The author argues that — given the socio-historical background — thinking within the tribal paradigm is not only acceptable but to be expected. It fulfils important functions that can only be met by the quasi-traditional interpretations.

Van Horn's account takes us to the Micmac, settled in "reservations" or "reserves" within their original territory in the state of Maine, of the northeastern United States, and the adjoining Canadian regions. They too work as commuters in various new professions frequently crossing the international border. In spite of European influence of more than four centuries, the Micmac have retained their particular eastern Algonkian language, their bilateral kinship organisation of patrilocal extended families and their old ethical standards, the topic of the article. Van Horn describes egalitarian values which in fact imply the idea of *noblesse oblige* for the leaders: a man of influence makes it "a point of honour to be always the worst dressed of his people". Micmac humour encourages people to make puns. It is self-depreciating and full of irony. Such an attitude and its consequences are found in many tribal communities all over the world, particularly in middle India. Members of the tribe "find it virtually impossible to accept authority of any kind". This individualism goes together with sharing work and money within the kinship unit. Environmental data for hunting and fishing or material possessions are property of the group. With regard to efforts of adjustment to the general conditions of North America it is found that educational and commercial enterprises fail when competitiveness is stressed in the European manner, whereas they succeed when undertaken as a group effort.

Another specific problem faced by tribals of the native American "reservations" is discussed in Suzuki's paper, the issue of double jeopardy, or accusations of a suspected criminal in a Tribal as well as in the Federal Court of the United States. A man of the Blackfeet tribe had to face the

Winnebago Tribal Court, because he had committed crimes on the "reservation" of the latter tribe. Being charged simultaneously by a Federal Court, the problem of "over-administration" in a culture adverse to bureaucratic institutions becomes evident.

Köhler's general overview of the indigenous population of Mexico is also a history of the devastation, caused by European conquest since the second decade of the 16th century. The Spanish colonialists destroyed the pre-Columbian civilisations that had been outstanding in the fields of science and administration. The conquerors killed, enslaved or decultured the population of the former empires. When the country obtained independence three hundred years later, it continued to be ruled by the European minority making up about 10 per cent of the population. The other ethnic categories of Mexico refer to the Ladinos, or supposed descendents of the native Indios and Europeans making up about 65 per cent, and finally Indios, mostly living in the southern states of the country. The Indio majority cannot really be considered tribal, since they differ from the assimilated Spanish-speaking society of Ladinos only due to their linguistic and cultural affiliation. None of the many different linguistic groups stands for common interests or political organisation, identity being associated with the particular locality or *municipio*, even if, as is the case among the Tzotzil in Chiapas, the language group is subdivided into many "tribes" marked by a particular dress and dialect. Many Indio commuters to the cities have the opportunity to be assimilated to the Spanish-speaking Ladino category within a short period of time. Thus the majority of indigenous Mexicans have lost the cultural expressions and values of their ancestor's complex society without a comparable substitute. In the north of Mexico, however, a region without pre-Columbian civilisations — the Indios like the Tarahumara of Chihuahua, the Yaqui or the Seri — have retained their tribal social structure. Anthropologists would not class them along with the native population of Mesoamerica but rather as a part of the "Greater Southwest" which also includes well-known southwestern tribes of the USA.

Finally Gregory's article, like Demmers at the end of the South Asia section in Part I, introduces a different societal type in a different political context. The author declares himself to be a peripheral member of a self-defined "tribe," the inhabitants of the Appalachian mountain-range in the eastern United States. In choosing such an identity, he is convinced that in the year 2000 "tribal communities are typically found in the backwash of modern society, without power and control over their own destiny". Perhaps several hundred million Asian tribals would contradict such a finding, i.e. being defined only by extended ties of kinship, strong religious beliefs, weak insiders and strong outsiders. The provocation of postmodern arbitrariness must, however, be taken as an appropriate final chapter of our attempt to reconsider our categories. The inhabitants of Appalachia are said to demonstrate their

"tribal" culture in several significant sketches the author has selected. Thus the hill-people of a Holler (mountain ridge) were observed to shoot systematically at outsiders' cars, or bright young people stayed home — because "family comes first" — even if this meant permanent professional stagnation and unemployment. Teachers of a university department never met for private dinners. These Appalachian "tribals" are said to have fundamentalist religious beliefs, even if their preachers are openly callous when it comes to the theft of a towel. They tell rich stories about secretly finding and selling ginseng roots in the woods outside the control of "revenooers" (government agents). For the author these are signs of "the inability to control one's own life, to stay on the side of law and order....and to maintain ever present kinship networks and alliances rather than engage in feuds". Exaggerated security arrangements for the powerful are also said to be an aspect of such "tribal" culture, just as secrecy and selfishness in financial matters or, among students, cutting out competitors by illegal means. Gregory's "tribals" celebrate weekends as fiddlers with their mountain music enthralling visitors, tourists and the musicians themselves. In short, they do not "move ahead" according to the standard American values but rather flee from "the terrors and insecurities of modern life" into the haven of an evangelical religion. They have been "vanquished and reside...in a state of plight akin to that of the Native Americans". Gregory's conclusion sees lifestyles, culture and patterns of Appalachia as "precursors for the future of all of us, around the world".

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